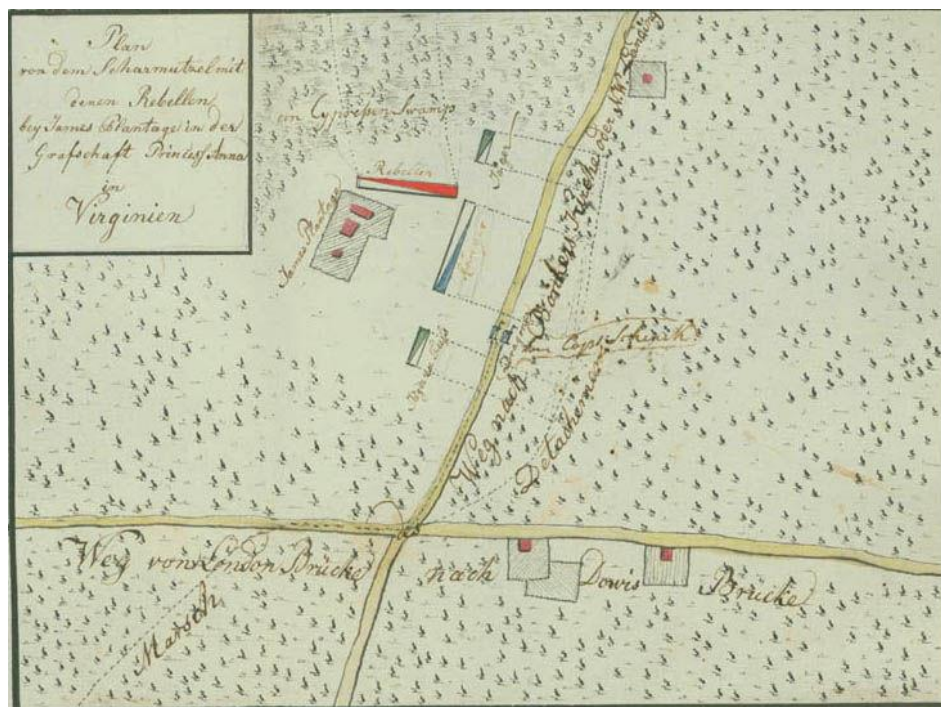


# The Skirmish at James's Plantation

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Historic Preservation Commission

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## **Acknowledgements**

While explaining the Skirmish at James's Plantation to my son, and how it was basically an unknown event for almost two centuries, he commented that it was amazing such an event could be "lost to history." I found that an excellent characterization. A research project such as this might lead the researcher in many different directions, raise many more questions, and perhaps provide a few stumbling blocks along the way. Hopefully, you might run into a "source" that can shed light on the topic and keep the research moving. Such was the case with James's Plantation and I want to recognize several "sources" who have aided in this research and have helped transform points of "speculation" into facts of "clarification." To prevent their contributions from being "lost to history," I want to thank:

The City of Virginia Beach Historic Preservation Commission for making the research grant program possible.

Ms. Jennifer Estes, historian at Nimmo Church, who believed that James's Plantation was somewhere near the location of the church and helped match some of the early Princess Anne County geographic names with modern names and locations.

Mr. Sam Morrison who was equally intrigued with mystery of the skirmish and provided the location of the land willed to Edward James's son as well as historic aerial imagery of the area. This helped to identify some of the boundaries of James's Plantation and narrow down the likely location of the skirmish.

Dr. Patrick Hannum, a Revolutionary War aficionado, whose interest in Princess Anne County resident Thomas Reynolds Walker helped to place several related aspects of the Revolutionary War in Princess Anne County into perspective.



When Tustin published the translated *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal* in 1979, it offered new insight into the partisan war effort of the British. It also gave the 1781 skirmish in Princess Anne County a place in the history of the American Revolution. Or did it?

Ewald's account, while providing more details than were ever known about the skirmish, actually raises even more questions: Why were British forces operating so deep into areas of Princess Anne County? What was their objective? Where is James's Plantation? Why are there no other accounts of a skirmish where 120 militia (not an insignificant number) were killed, wounded, and captured? This study will try to answer those questions in order to place the Skirmish at James's Plantation into its proper place in the histories of Princess Anne County; Virginia; and the American Revolution.

As a result of the diary, the event at James's Plantation was also recognized in the 2007 *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States* as an "Other Site of Interest" associated with events of local significance that had not been surveyed or evaluated by the National Park Service.<sup>2</sup> That same report also identified another Princess Anne County site - Cape Henry - in the same category.

Note on terminology: The term "James's Plantation" will be used to describe both the skirmish site and the plantation of Edward James. Johann Ewald used "James's" in his journal and this is the sole source mentioning the site in this form. While the form written "James'" is equally grammatically correct, the version used by Ewald will be retained throughout this study.

For the purposes of this study, the term "Patriot" will be used to identify those individuals who fought for independence from Great Britain. In some quoted material, the term "rebel" might also be used. Additionally, when the term "militia" is used, it will refer to Patriot militias. Conversely, the term "Loyalist" will be used to identify those individuals still loyal to the King. The term "Tory" in quoted materials will also refer to Loyalists.

Many names of roads and geographic features have changed over the years. To place into context a 1781 name with its modern location the word "modern" may be used in front of the name currently used (for example: modern Salem Road).

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<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, September 2007), 110.



## How does this Skirmish fit into the American Revolution?

Determining the approximate location of James's Plantation, and thus the location of a fairly significant event in Princess Anne County, raises many questions on why this event happened in the first place. The location of James's Plantation was far enough away from the primary objectives of the British in Virginia that there must be some other, not readily apparent reason.

Located in southeast Virginia, Princess Anne County occupies the area where the Chesapeake Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean. Primarily an agricultural community, Princess Anne County boasted a population of less than 7,000 inhabitants in 1775.<sup>3</sup> Its location was geographically away from the center of revolutionary activity in Virginia in the capital of Williamsburg, but close enough to feel the effects of the conflict first hand. Reviewing the Revolutionary activities in Princess Anne County is necessary to provide an idea of the increasing importance of the area.

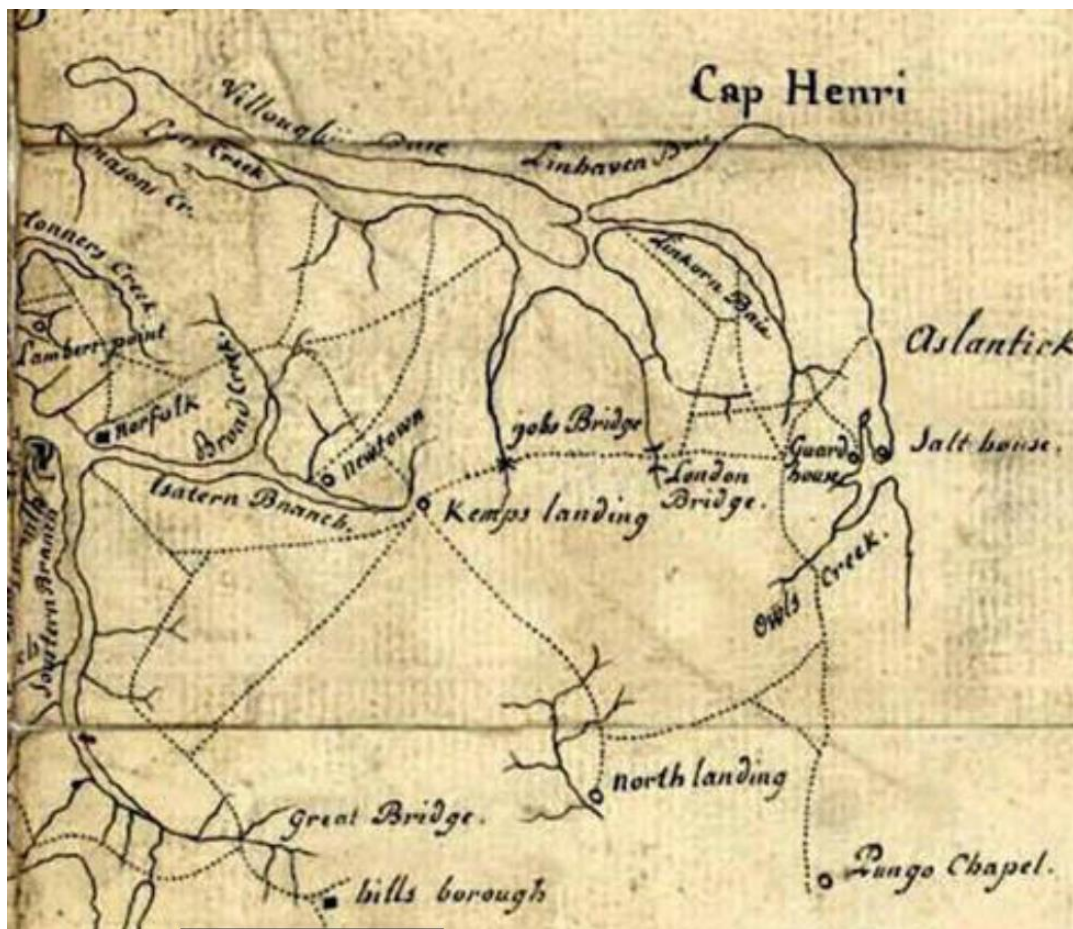


Figure 2: Excerpt from French Map of the region showing Princess Anne County (Library of Congress)

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States taken in the Year 1790, Records of the State Enumerations: 1782 to 1785 – Virginia* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 10. The 1783 enumeration for Princess Anne County included 3,999 white residents and 6,655 slaves.

Events in 1775: Dissatisfaction with the British in Massachusetts, and the associated activities that pitted Patriot against Loyalist, caught the attention of Virginia Governor John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore. As a pre-emptive action, Dunmore removed the gunpowder from the magazine in Williamsburg to a British warship in the York River to prevent it from falling into the hands of any potential Virginia rebels.<sup>4</sup> This event only increased the tensions in Virginia and ultimately forced Dunmore and his family to flee to a British warship – the HMS *Fowey*. Dunmore used the *Fowey* as a floating “governor’s palace” and as his command center to conduct raids ashore to disrupt Patriot activities. In October, his forces conducted a raid on Norfolk, primarily to destroy the print shop that was publishing opposition pamphlets. British forces pushed further into the village of Kemp’s Landing in Princess Anne County, to disrupt militia activities there and capture any cannon, powder, or weapons. Finding no powder or cannon, the British did remove several muskets at the blacksmith shop for repair.

In November, hearing of another militia force gathering at the Great Bridge, Dunmore personally led the force to the area. Finding no rebels at the Great Bridge, Dunmore ordered the construction of a fort north of the bridge to control the route, which was the primary route from North Carolina. This became Fort Murray. When an intelligence report indicated that up to 300 militia were assembling at Kemp’s Landing, Dunmore and his force headed in that direction. The militia, receiving word of Dunmore’s movement, positioned in the woods along the approach road to set up an ambush. The militia, firing too early at the advance guard, received heavy return fire from the British where several militia were killed or wounded and a number of them captured. Dunmore occupied the home of Princess Anne County loyalist George Logan and issued his proclamation declaring martial law and freedom to any slaves or indentured servants willing to fight for the King.<sup>5</sup> He also forced residents to swear an oath of loyalty or risk being declared a rebel.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 3: Virginia Historic Highway Marker honoring the Skirmish at Kemp’s Landing. Dedicated November 10, 2018. (Photo by Mark Reed)

<sup>4</sup> Bart Reynolds, *Primary Documents Relating to the Seizure of Powder at Williamsburg, VA, April 21, 1775*, <http://www.revwar75.com/battles/primarydocs/williamsburg.htm>. The documents come from the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (NDAR), Volume 1.

<sup>5</sup> Dunmore’s Proclamation can be found in National Archives of Great Britain, CO 5/1353, no. 335 (7 Nov 1775). An illustration of the Proclamation is at: *Digital History Reader*, “Module 03, A Revolution for Whom?” [http://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/us/mod03\\_rev/evidence\\_detail\\_01.html](http://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/us/mod03_rev/evidence_detail_01.html).

<sup>6</sup> A very balanced account of the October raid and November Skirmish at Kemp’s Landing comes from Ivor Noel Hume, *1775: Another Part of the Field* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), 390-394. While some of the details of the event have changed due to more recent research and analysis of the event, Hume does manage to dispel the “drunken militia” legend that has permeated the Skirmish at Kemp’s Landing for many decades (if not longer).

In December, hearing of a large force of Virginia and North Carolina militia gathering at the Great Bridge, Dunmore ordered his forces to attack. Marching side by side across the narrow causeway the British became easy targets for the militia. In the end, the militia repelled the British, who experienced considerable losses, while the Patriots suffered one minor casualty. Dunmore's forces retreated back to Norfolk then back to their ships with the Patriot forces in pursuit.<sup>7</sup>

Events in 1776: Following the defeat at Great Bridge, the British maintained their positions aboard the ships in the Elizabeth River. As the Patriot forces massed in Norfolk, Dunmore ordered his ships to fire on known Patriot homes and businesses in Norfolk, as well as on the Patriots themselves. The Patriots responded by burning the homes and businesses of known Loyalists, many seeking safety on the British ships. The ensuing conflagration essentially burned Norfolk to the ground.<sup>8</sup> The Patriots continued to fire at the British ships and realizing that the Elizabeth River was becoming too dangerous, Dunmore relocated his forces, and the many dozens of civilian Loyalists onboard the ships, further up the Chesapeake Bay to Gwynn's Island. The isolated area kept Dunmore and the British safe from Patriot attacks and the lack of cannon prevented the Patriots from carrying out any decisive action against Dunmore. During this period of relative "siege warfare" the Declaration of Independence was signed declaring the thirteen colonies free of British control. Unable to obtain reinforcements and finding it difficult to procure supplies for the troops and civilian Loyalists on the ships, the British evacuated Virginia and headed to British controlled New York City.<sup>9</sup>

Events in 1777: Once Dunmore and the British forces left the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia was bypassed in much of the larger war effort. With most of the fighting between the British and the Continental Army taking place in the Middle-Atlantic states of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, Virginia returned to a rather peaceful and prosperous existence. In mid-1777, Josiah Phillips, characterized as a Tory laborer from Lynnhaven Parish in Princess Anne County, began a series of terror raids across southeastern Virginia, including Princess Anne County, primarily against known Patriots. Phillips and his band of ruffians managed to escape capture by law enforcement for many months.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the relatively peaceful nature of the area, local merchants called for increased defensive measures along the coast. The Council of the State of Virginia resolved:

"that for the safety of the Trade of this Commonwealth there be immediately set upon the point of Land at Cape Henry on a staff fifty feet high at least, a white flag striped with

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<sup>7</sup> For a first-hand account of the Battle of Great Bridge see Colonel Woodford to Edmund Pendleton, December 10, 1775, Peter Force, ed., *American Archives, Containing a Documentary History of the English Colonies in North America*, Fourth Series, Vol IV (Washington, DC: M. St. Clair Clarke, 1843), 233.

<sup>8</sup> See Patrick H. Hannum, "Norfolk, Virginia, Sacked by North Carolina and Virginia Troops," *Journal of the American Revolution*, November 6, 2017, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2017/11/norfolk-virginia-sacked-north-carolina-virginia-troops/>.

<sup>9</sup> John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 124-126.

<sup>10</sup> Jesse Turner, "Four Fugitive Cases from the Realm of American Constitutional Law," *American Law Review*, 49 (1915), 818-828. Also, John Alonza George, "Virginia Loyalists, 1775-1783," *Richmond College Historical Review*, 1, No. 2 (June 1916): 173-221.



Red to be constantly kept hoisted in the day when no enemy is within the Capes and taken down when an enemy appears; that there be also hoisted on the sd staff a proper light to be kept constantly burning in the night Time when no Enemy is within the Capes and taken down on the approach of the enemy, and that Colo: Thomas Reynolds Walker of Princess Anne be desired to have the same properly executed, and the Commander Officer of the Garrison at Portsmouth be directed to keep a subalterns or Serjeants Guard at the Cape for the purpose of hoisting the flag by day, and keeping up the light by night, and to give Intelligence of the approach of the enemy.<sup>11</sup>

The signal station at Cape Henry was established and friendly merchant vessels were advised on how to interpret the signals (which differed from those proposed above):

Signal to be observed at Cape Henry

If it's very dangerous to get in that is to say if the Men of War command the Capes Four Distinct Fire's will be seen.

If they are within the Cape's and ly in Hampton Road or pretty high up Chesepeak, three distinct will be seen.

If no Danger their Two distinct Fires will appear.

A Guard of 50 Men stationed their for the Protection of Vessells that may go on shore to get clear of the Enemy.<sup>12</sup>

Events in 1778: A Bill of Attainder was issued so that "It shall be lawful for any person with or without orders, to pursue and slay the said Josiah Philips"<sup>13</sup> Phillips was captured by a group led by Amos Weeks of Princess Anne County who figures prominently in the Skirmish at James's Plantation. The Virginia Gazette reported Phillips' execution as November 23, 1778:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Journal entry Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> day of February 1777, H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the Council of the State of Virginia*, 1 (Richmond, VA: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1931), 350-51. One of the original merchant recommendations is contained in a letter from James Hunter to Col William Aylett, February 6, 1777, in *Tyler's Quarterly*, 1 ( ): 98-99. Hunter stated: "I should think it a great Favour done the Public if you could contrive to have a few men stationed at Cape Henry, (close in with which all Vessels come), and have Two masts erected, with two large Flags, one Red, the other White-at night Two Lanthornes-should the enemy be in, hoist the Red by day, one Lanthorne at night-the Coast being clear, Vice Versa-as this cannot be attended with great Expençe, and the Service it would yield our Trade, I do not see but we might be indulged, even with a Guard of Two Hundred and a little Fort to keep off Boats-The apprehension of Danger first taught us to provide against it."

<sup>12</sup> "John King to the American Commissioners, 9 October 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-25-02-0026>. [Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25, *October 1, 1777, through February 28, 1778*, ed. William B. Willcox. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 53-54.].

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Quote from Jack Lynch, "A Patriot, a Traitor, and a Bill of Attainder," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, (Spring 2002), <http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/spring02/attainder.cfm>.

<sup>14</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon & Hunter Edition, December 4, 1778, 2.

This day were executed at the gallows near this city, pursuant to their sentence, the following criminals, viz. Jofiah Phillips, Henry M'Clanen, Robert Hodges, John Reafor, and Jofiah Blankinship.

Figure 4: Excerpt from Virginia Gazette (Colonial Williamsburg)

Despite the capture and execution of Phillips, the British would make occasional appearances off the coast. In one case, the HMS *Swift* was in pursuit of the American privateer *Rattlesnake* and ran aground off Cape Henry. As was reported to the Virginia Council of State: “that a British Ship of War (the *Swift*) in chace of the *Rattlesnake* privateer, run aground near Cape Henry, & that the Crew to the number of 91 had surrendered themselves prisoners of War to Colonel Thomas Reynolds Walker, of Princess Anne.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, a large number of British were captured by chance.

Events in 1779: In May of 1779, a naval force under the command of Sir George Collier arrived in the Chesapeake Bay with the express purpose of raiding the coastal regions of Virginia and destroying any provisions destined for Washington’s army. The three-week operation captured several vessels and various weapons and destroyed numerous stockpiles of supplies while severely disrupting trade in the region.<sup>16</sup> An interesting side note from this operation was the capture of several prominent Princess Anne County residents who were used to effect the exchange of certain Loyalists being held by the Patriots. In one case, Charles Williamson and John Smith were captured and held by the British in the May 1779 raid. When Williamson applied for parole, he was informed that “Neither of the Above Named Gentlemen [Williamson and Smith] would be Exchanged or Liberated until a Colonel Elligood in Virginia, should Either be sent into the British lines, Set at Liberty in Virginia, or some treaty Concluded Respecting him.”<sup>17</sup> The person being held by the Patriots, since 1776, was Jacob Ellegood, a wealthy Princess Anne County landowner and Loyalist who was paroled in 1781 and eventually made his to New Brunswick after the war.<sup>18</sup>

Events in 1780: In October of 1780, Major General Alexander Leslie arrived in Virginia for the express purpose of fortifying Portsmouth as a place to launch attacks into North Carolina, supporting General Cornwallis and his operations in the Carolinas.<sup>19</sup> Leslie’s arrival sent panic through Virginia and North Carolina as both states attempted to rally both regular forces and militia to oppose the incursion. As was reported to the governor of North Carolina, Aber Nash:

“I have certain intelligence from Virginia that last Sunday evening the Enemy landed at Portsmouth to the amount of one Thousand men & upwards. They came in sixty Sail of

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<sup>15</sup> “Session of Virginia Council of State, 27 November 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-01-02-0089>. [Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 1, 16 March 1751–16 December 1779, ed. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 269–270.].

<sup>16</sup> See John Almon, ed., *The Remembrancer or Impartial Repository of Public Events*, VIII, Part II, (London: Printed for J. Almon. 1779), 290–297.

<sup>17</sup> Matthias Halsted to Virginia Delegates in Congress, 17 December 1780,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-02-02-0137>. [Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 2, 20 March 1780–23 February 1781, ed. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 243–245.].

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Ellegood, Sr., *The Loyalist Collection*, <https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/node/4709>.

<sup>19</sup> A. R. Newsome, ed., “A British Orderly Book,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, IX, no. 2 (April 1932): 163–186.

Vessels. It seems their intention is to march through this State to form a junction with Lord Cornwallis. They sent in two hundred men into Princess Ann County, and plundered it totally and drove in the Cattle. They took Mr. Thorowgood & Mr. Wake, [Walke?] with several other valuable citizens, and carried them on Board the Fleet, to send them, as is supposed, to some other Country to be tried.”<sup>20</sup>

After determining that operations from Virginia were not necessary, Leslie was ordered south to reinforce Cornwallis in South Carolina. Leslie effected a hasty retreat from Portsmouth leaving the fortifications intact, and embarking on the ships destined for Charleston. As detailed in the *Order Book*: “The Fleet got under Way & Stood down the Bay for Sea, Nothing transpired during our Anchorage in the Bay except the Enemy's taking the Delight, Barge & Crewe afterwards exchanged & Shewing themselves in Small Nrs on the Princess Ann Shore.”<sup>21</sup>

On December 29, 1780, a British force of 27 ships anchored in Lynnhaven Bay. On December 30<sup>th</sup>, the fleet weighed anchor and proceeded into Hampton Roads.<sup>22</sup>

Events in 1781: The force arriving in Virginia late in 1780 was under the command of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold. Arnold was formerly a Major General in the Continental Army who distinguished himself in numerous battles early in the war. A growing dissatisfaction with promotion and recognition caused Arnold to start associating with Loyalist sympathizers in an attempt to turn the war in favor of the British and gain fame in the process. After securing the command of West Point, New York, Arnold plotted to turn the fortification over to the British, giving them control of a strategic location on the Hudson and potentially isolating Washington’s army in the process. When this plan was discovered, Arnold defected to New York City into the safety of the British.<sup>23</sup>

General Sir Henry Clinton, Commander-in-Chief for North America, appointed Arnold a Brigadier General in the British Army. Finding himself with an extra General and little extra forces to command, Clinton decided to send Arnold on a mission to Virginia to continue the work of Leslie from earlier in the year. His forces were a mix of regular and Loyalist troops recruited locally which included:

80 <sup>th</sup> , or Edinburgh Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Dundas	600
The Queen’s Rangers, Horse and Infantry under Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe	600
Colonel Beverly Robinson’s Provincials	250
Brigadier General Arnold’s own corps	200
Total	1650 <sup>24</sup>

Johann Ewald, in his *Diary of the America War*, lists the following units comprising 2,220 men:

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Smith to Abner Nash, October 24, 1780, in Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, 15 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Bros., Book and Job Printers, 1898), 129-130. As in the case of Williamson and Smith in 1779, the two may have been captured to facilitate prisoner exchanges although it is not clear which Thorowgood or Walke were captured.

<sup>21</sup> “A British Orderly Book,” entry for November 22, 1780, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 258.

<sup>23</sup> See William Sterne Randall, *Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor*, (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> “Note 176. Troops under Brigadier-General Arnold,” in Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain, from 1727 to 1783*, VI, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1804), 213.

The Hessian and Anspach foot jagers  
The light infantry  
The English Grenadiers  
Two battalions of Hessian grenadiers  
The 80<sup>th</sup> Regiment  
The Anspach Brigade  
The Ranger Corps  
Robinson's Corps  
The Althouse sharpshooters<sup>25</sup>

Arnold had a three-fold mission: attack any of the Continental Army magazines and supply depots ("provided it may be done without much risk"), "establish a post at Portsmouth on Elizabeth River," and "distribute the proclamations you take with you (which are to be addressed to the inhabitants of Princess Anne and Norfolk Counties)."<sup>26</sup> Clinton's focus on Princess Anne and Norfolk counties was to add to the defensibility of Portsmouth in securing the eastern flank and the primary approach from North Carolina (via the Great Bridge). The intent was to recruit Loyalists from those counties to secure the area and approaches from that region. The Dismal Swamp would protect the south; the navy would protect the Elizabeth River leaving only the western flank toward Suffolk needing any great degree of defenses.

Once underway from the Lynnhaven anchorage, Arnold proceeded up the James River, secured the two gun battery at Hood's<sup>27</sup>, and landed just outside of Richmond. Receiving little opposition from the Patriots, Arnold's force destroyed the foundry at Richmond as well as the magazine and numerous other public and private stores. Retreating back down the James River, the British also destroyed any targets of opportunity along the way while fighting several minor skirmishes with local militias. They arrived at Portsmouth on January 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 255.

<sup>26</sup> "Extract from Sir Henry Clinton's instructions to Brigadier General Arnold. Headquarters, New York, December 14, 1780," in Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of his Campaigns, 1775-1782, with an appendix of original documents*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 482-83.

<sup>27</sup> The battery at Hood's was on a point of land on the James River in Prince George County across from Weyanoke. It provided an excellent position both to control the narrow part of the river with the mounted cannon and as an observation post to inform Richmond of any activity on the river. Today it is known as Fort Powhatan. See: Lee A. Wallace, Jr., "The Battery at Hood's," *Virginia Cavalcade*, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 38-47.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Cecere, *Invasion of Virginia, 1781*, (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2017).; Francis Rives Lassiter, "Arnold's Invasion of Virginia," *The Sewanee Review*, 9, no. 1 (Jan 1901): 78-93 and 9, no. 2 (Apr 1901): 185-203.

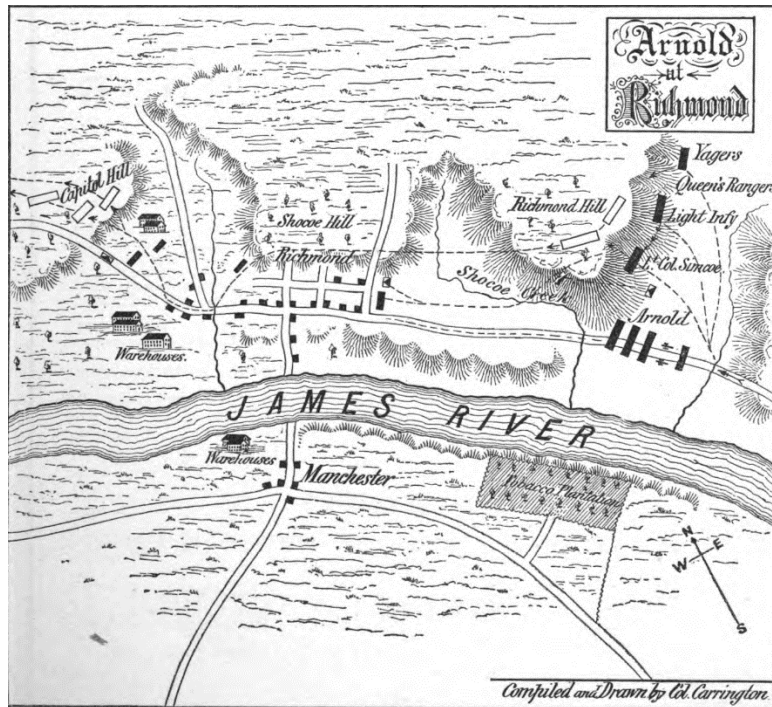


Figure 5: Map of Arnold's action at Richmond (Battles of the American Revolution)

Having destroyed the stores at Richmond and thus achieving their first task, the British commenced with their next objective – fortifying the post at Portsmouth. The fortifications that were started by Leslie the previous year were left intact on his departure and gave Arnold a good starting point to strengthen. As Arnold reported:

“No time has been lost in repairing the old and erecting new works here (in which the Negroes have been very serviceable) but none are yet compleat. Repairing Barracks, foraging and patrolling with large Parties, has engrossed the time of a great part of the Troops. One hundred Men are posted at the Great Bridge. Lieut. Colonel Simcoe, with near Four hundred Men, are in Princess Anne County scouring the Country of several parties and arranging matters with the Country people.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Benedict Arnold to Henry Clinton, February 13, 1781, in Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, 17, (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Bros., Book and Job Printers, 1898), 984-986.





Figure 6: Plan of Portsmouth where Arnold established his post (Library of Congress)

At the time it appeared that the greatest threat to Arnold’s mission was the militia at Suffolk “with Two thousand five hundred, or three thousand men.”<sup>30</sup> Arnold even proposed a scheme to secure the Currituck Sound, create a diversion in that region to support the British operations in North Carolina, and control the rivers leading from Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties to further limit militia movements from the south.<sup>31</sup> Even the appearance of three French vessels in Lynnhaven Bay proved short lived and of minimal threat.<sup>32</sup> The biggest impediment to Arnold’s operation, however, were small bands of local militia operating throughout the adjoining areas. These groups of militia threatened not only the post at Portsmouth but the larger goal of recruiting in Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties.

These were the events leading to the skirmish at James’s Plantation.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 985.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Benedict Arnold to Henry Clinton, February 25, 1781, Ibid., 987.

## Where is James's Plantation?

Determining the actual location of James's Plantation is as elusive as knowledge of the skirmish itself. The only significant account of the event, specifically mentioning the location as James's Plantation, comes from Ewald's *Diary*. This single account provides the opportunity to piece together information from other accounts to put British and Militia activities into a better context. Movements of certain troops to a specific location might be explained as a response to the skirmish at James's or certain decisions made now make better sense knowing that this skirmish may have influenced that decision. The bottom line: Princess Anne County played a larger role in the American Revolution than originally believed or than has been attributed to this point.

In locating James's Plantation, the best source of information was Johann Ewald himself. Ewald left a very detailed and comprehensive account of his activities during the war. His descriptions of the terrain, localities, people, and the events themselves provide the best data to reconstruct the event at James's Plantation. Period maps provide the best visual representation of the region at the time of the event but are often just generalized depictions of the area without regard to scale or accuracy. The depiction of a structure in Ewald's maps, for example, may be in reality, a few yards from a road on the same map, or several hundred yards from that road. Despite the inaccuracies of the maps, they are still very useful in determining relative positions of movements, crossings, geographic features and even the likely roads that may have been traversed by the forces.

Period maps useful in reconstructing Ewald's march to James's Plantation include:

- Maps and drawings from Ewald's journal, 1781
- Plan of Princess Ann and Norfolk counties, 178?<sup>33</sup>
- Virginie. Embouchure de la Baye de Chesapeake by Henri Crublier d'Opterre, 1783<sup>34</sup>
- Plan des Environs de Williamsburg, York, Hampton, et Portsmouth, 1781<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the maps, there are a handful of key primary sources that were consulted. First and foremost is Ewald's journal which detailed the skirmish but also demonstrated the difficulties faced by the British in southeastern Virginia early in 1781. Ewald also published another work on partisan warfare – the very type of warfare he practiced on behalf of the British – called, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare* in 1785.<sup>36</sup> Ewald's British counterpart in the Virginia operations, Lt Col John Graves Simcoe, also published his *Military Journal of the Queen's Rangers* detailing similar aspects of partisan warfare and fills in a couple of interesting pieces of the James's Plantation puzzle.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Plan of Princess Ann and Norfolk counties*. [Virginia: s.n., 178-?, 1780] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012589670/>.

<sup>34</sup> Crublier d'Opterre, Henri. *Virginie. Embouchure De La Baye De Chesapeake*. [1783] Map. <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3524668>.

<sup>35</sup> *Plan des environs de Williamsburg, York, Hampton, et Portsmouth*. [1781] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71002173/>.

<sup>36</sup> Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, Robert A Selig and David Curtiss Skaggs, translation and introduction, Contributions in Military Studies, Number 116, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> John Graves Simcoe, *Simcoe's Military Journal: A History of the Operations of a Partisan Corps, called the Queen's Rangers*, (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1844).

The following is an excerpt from Ewald's diary which details the events and movements leading to the Skirmish at James's Plantation. It is provided verbatim as transcribed and translated in *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal* translated and edited by Joseph P. Tustin. Footnotes provided by Tustin are included but contained in brackets [ ] to denote the original work. Amplifications to Tustin's footnotes are outside of the bracketed sections and additional footnotes or information are listed as traditional footnotes without brackets.

This excerpt is from "Volume IV: Sixth Campaign, 1781 up to the Return to Hesse, 1784; Chapter 2 - From the arrival at Portsmouth and the union of the army under Lord Cornwallis up to the arrival of the army at York and Gloucester; Part One - From the arrival at Portsmouth until after the affair before Portsmouth, in which I was wounded."

[Start of quoted material from Johann Ewald]

Having rested since the evening of the day before yesterday, I used the opportunity to roam through the entire area to orient myself. I discovered that Scott's Creek protected half of our front on the right up to a distance of about a half an hour. This marshy creek falls into the Elizabeth a good half hour's distance below the town. Between this creek and the one which flows into the Elizabeth River just below the town is a thick swampy wood in which a plantation is situated. But at Scott's plantation, which lies on the other side, there is a causeway where one can cross the creek. On my return, I proposed that I should lie in this wood at the causeway, since otherwise Portsmouth could easily be reconnoitered and attacked



Figure 7: Captain Johann Ewald (Ewald Diary)

from here through the aid of the woods. But since no enemy was to be feared, no attention was paid to my idea. I also found that our right through Mill Point, which lay somewhat higher than the town to the right across the creek, could be flanked and bombarded. For my part, I would not have chosen Portsmouth for a fortified post without having constructed a good work on Mill Point, and another on the right bank of the river at the Norfolk distillery. By this means one would be complete master of the river, and since Portsmouth can be fired upon from Mill Point, this could easily be prevented by a redoubt.<sup>38</sup>

On the 23d [January], about three o'clock in the morning, the jagers and rangers under Colonel Simcoe<sup>39</sup> crossed the Elizabeth River and landed on Powder Point<sup>40</sup> above Norfolk. The march was continued immediately toward Great Bridge to reconnoiter this area. During the night Colonel Dundas with 250 men of the 80th Regiment went up

<sup>38</sup> [1 Major General William Phillips, who arrived at Portsmouth on March 27, expressed much the same opinion (Phillips to Clinton, April 3, 1781, The Henry Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library).]

<sup>39</sup> Commander of the Queen's Rangers.

<sup>40</sup> Powder Point is located in the modern day Berkeley section of Norfolk.



the river in boats to get in the rear in case Great Bridge was occupied by the enemy. The two detachments met around midday.

We had hardly arrived when we found a loyal-minded subject, which was regarded as a miracle, although General Arnold had asserted that when he made an appearance the people would change their minds in droves. The man gave us the news that six hundred Americans were advancing toward us. It was decided immediately not to wait for them but to proceed toward them. We set out at once on the road toward Suffolk, and we were scarcely a quarter of an hour away when I, with the advanced guard, ran into an enemy party which withdrew hastily after a few rifle shots. Captain Shank<sup>41</sup> followed at once, overtook them in the defiles of Edmunds Bridge,<sup>42</sup> cut down a part of them, and captured a captain and three dragoons. Through them we learned that General Gregory,<sup>43</sup> with a corps of three thousand men, had taken post behind the swamps one and a half German miles from Great Bridge. Following this information, we retired at once to Great Bridge.

Toward evening the detachment set out toward Kemp's Landing,<sup>44</sup> arriving during the night. This pass was likewise reconnoitered.

#### Remarks on the two passes of Great Bridge and Kemp's Landing.

Great Bridge is an important position in Virginia, if Portsmouth is to be designated and maintained as a fortified post. It consists of a village of twenty-five fine buildings and is inhabited by tradespeople, who, however, had all flown and left us their good Madeira and large stocks of provisions. The place lies on the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, ten English miles from Portsmouth, where several small creeks fall in.

These creeks, along with the two banks of the river, form an impenetrable marsh of fifteen to sixteen hundred paces. A single causeway passes over this swampland, and there is a wooden bridge in the middle which

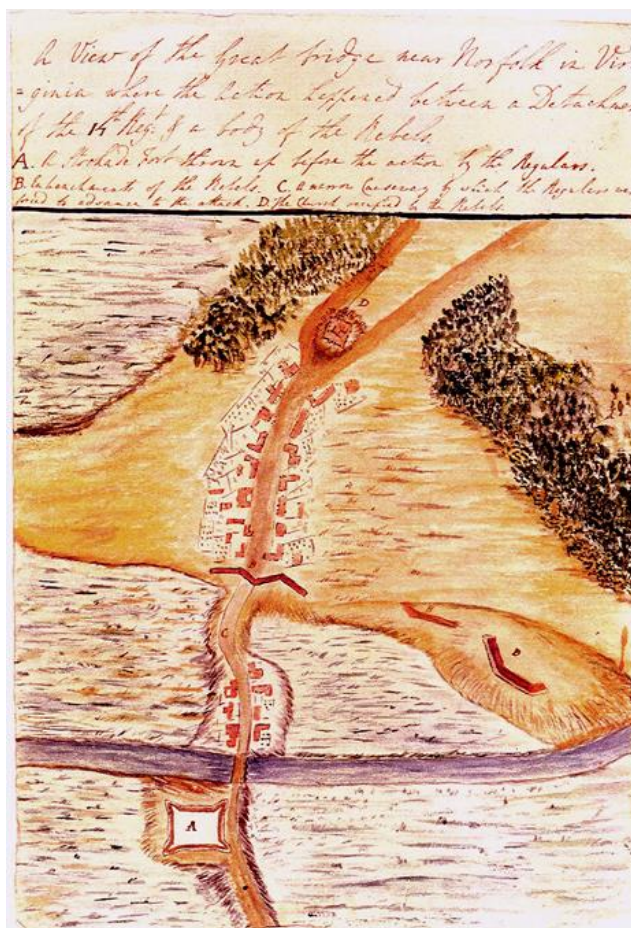


Figure 8: Leslie's Map of Great Bridge, 1775 (Colonial Williamsburg)

<sup>41</sup> [2 Queen's Rangers' cavalry.]

<sup>42</sup> [3 Edmunds Bridge was southwest of Great Bridge. This bridge and some of the places identified later are shown in "Sketch of Part of Princess Ann, Norfolk, and Nansemond County's in the Province of Virginia, 1781," Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.]

<sup>43</sup> [4 Brigadier General Isaac Gregory, commanding North Carolina militia; he was wounded at Camden on August 16, 1780 (Heitman, *Officers of the Continental Army*, p. 262).]

<sup>44</sup> [5 Usually spelled Kemp's Landing, but also Kempe's Landing, after James Kempe. It became Kempsville in 1783.]

rests on trestles and piers. This long bridge, from which the village takes its name, is 223 paces in length.<sup>45</sup>

The Elizabeth River as well as the small creeks rise in the great Dismal Swamp, an immense swampy woodland which extends from here into North Carolina. One can cross from here to North Carolina only at Great Bridge. Indeed, the inhabitants have made a passageway through this wilderness, with the help of fallen trees (called logs), for single travelers on foot. One can cross here with the aid of a compass, but if the year is not very dry, it is impassable.

Since the Northwest River also rises in the Dismal Swamp to the south, and flows into the Currituck Sound, it has only one crossing, a miserable wooden bridge called Northwest Landing Place.<sup>46</sup>

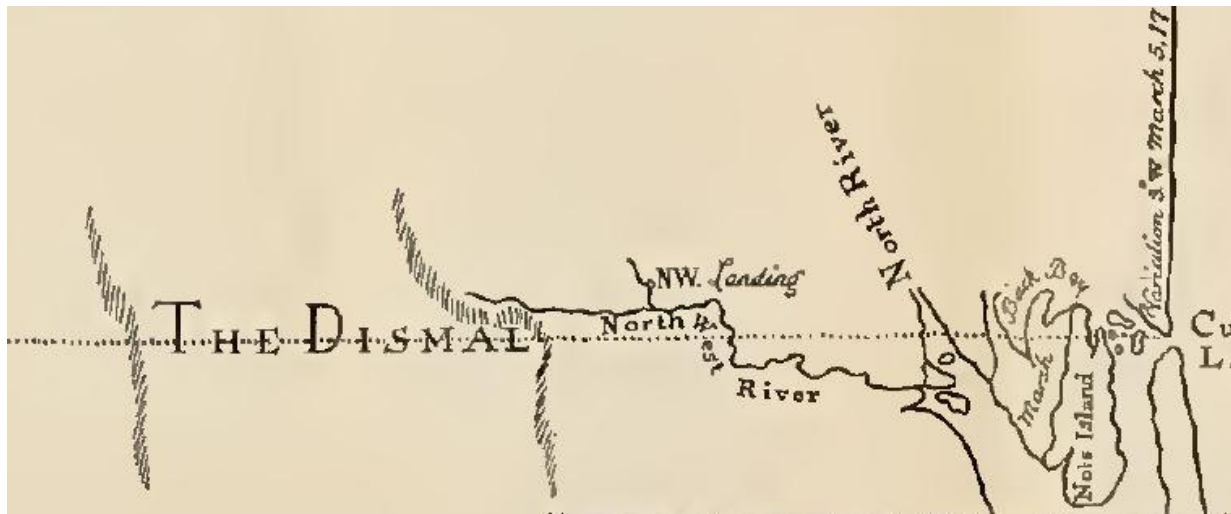


Figure 9: 1729 Map showing the Northwest and North Landing Rivers and the Northwest Landing (William Byrd)

<sup>45</sup> [6 The length of the Great Bridge given by Ewald, 223 paces, would include the approaches over the marshes, or a total length of about 186 yards (1 pace = 2 ½ feet). Lossing, who visited the bridge in 1848, says, “The Great Bridge proper is about forty yards in length” (*Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, II, 327).]

<sup>46</sup> While Ewald specifically mentions the Northwest River he does not identify the North Landing River which is the river he would have to cross at some point during his movement from the Great Bridge to James’s Plantation. Both rivers flow into Currituck Sound but only the North Landing River crosses directly into Princess Anne County. The modern crossing of the Intercoastal Waterway by North Landing Road roughly corresponds to the “North Landing” indicated on a 1781 French map of the region (see: *Plan des environs de Williamsburg, York, Hampton, et Portsmouth*. [1781] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71002173/>). On the “Plan of Princess Ann and Norfolk Counties” the “North River” is shown splitting into two branches. North Landing is shown on the branch that leads to the “northwest” while the other branch leads to Dauge’s Bridge. These correspond with the modern named North Landing River leading to North Landing (bridge and road) while the other branch - West Neck Creek – leads to the modern Dozier’s Bridge. North West Landing is shown on the 1729 William Byrd survey map of the Virginia-North Carolina border. See William K. Boyd, ed., *William Byrd’s histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, (Raleigh, NC: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), 363.



Thus, he who is master of the James and Elizabeth rivers and holds Portsmouth, Great Bridge, and the Northwest River crossing in his hands is the complete master of the entire part of Virginia called Princess Anne County, which lies between these two passes, Chesapeake Bay, and the James and Elizabeth rivers.

Kemp's Landing<sup>47</sup> consists of ninety dwellings, and is a trading place because of its location. It lies close to the source of the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River. If this place were protected by a redoubt occupied with one hundred men and two guns, or only a mere detachment of light troops, any enemy troops which ventured to cross the logs would be cut off.

The 24<sup>th</sup> [January]. Toward ten o'clock in the morning we left Kemp's Landing, and one captain with sixty rangers was posted there. We marched back by way of New Town and Norfolk.

Since they had relied at Portsmouth on this detached party, they had undertaken a little foraging by the English artillery along the road to Great Bridge at the time. On the way back, however, their escort fell into an enemy ambush at Pallet's Mill, during which one artillery officer was killed and several artillerymen were captured.

This enemy party is said to have been from a light corps commanded by a certain Major Weeks,<sup>48</sup> to whom the country people are greatly devoted, partly from inclination and partly from fear. In the countryside he is considered an excellent officer and a good partisan. There was much talk about him at Kemp's Landing, but we laughed because we had neither seen nor heard anyone. Afterward, we were astonished over the trick that he had played in our rear.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> [January] the jagers and rangers, under Colonel Simcoe, marched to Great Bridge in order to take post there and to protect the workers who had to throw up a redoubt for one hundred men and two guns.<sup>49</sup> Three hundred Negroes were taken there, who arrived by water about the same time. The work was completed in three days. We then removed a part of the Great Bridge and laid a footbridge for communication by land. During this task the colonel remained with the workmen, and I occupied the Edmunds Bridge toward Suffolk with fifty jagers and two companies of rangers.



*Figure 10: 1810 Map of Kemp's Landing  
(Norfolk Historical Society)*

<sup>47</sup> Kemp's Landing is also shown on the same map.

<sup>48</sup> [7 Captain Amos Weeks, a Virginia militia officer who lived in Princess Anne County.]

<sup>49</sup> This fort was built to the south and west of the site of the 1775 Fort Murray.



Figure 11: Detail of the redoubt at Great Bridge (Library of Congress)

We returned during the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> [January]. The redoubt was garrisoned by one captain and one hundred men of the 80th Regiment.

On the 9th of February, reports were received from our patrols that General Lawson<sup>50</sup> and one thousand men had taken a position on the height of Doctor Hall's<sup>51</sup> plantation. General Arnold quickly decided to attack him.

At eight o'clock in the evening, in very rainy, dark, and stormy weather, the jagers, one hundred rangers, and one hundred men of Robinson's under Colonel Simcoe silently boarded the boats at Portsmouth and entered the Western Branch of the Elizabeth River. At midnight we landed at Sutherland's plantation to attack the enemy in the rear.

From there we made our way alongside the river through pathless wood and marshes until we fell into the highway from Suffolk, about half an hour from Hall's plantation. We halted here and formed into close platoons, one behind the other. The jagers were ordered to shoot at the people who were revealed by their fire, and the rangers and Robinson's men were given orders to swiftly attack everyone with the bayonet.

Several hundred paces away lay a bridge, which the enemy had occupied at the rear. The colonel ordered me to select twenty rangers and to make myself master of the bridge by trick or by force. We set out and I asked my men only to remain silent and follow me. I took two brave fellows with me and made up my mind, if I were challenged, to say nothing like "Good friend!", but to attack the enemy sharply and follow him swiftly. But to our chagrin we found no one near the bridge. The bird had flown the nest an hour before. The fires were still burning brightly.

Here we met Colonel Dundas, who had gone out with all the cavalry and two hundred men of the 80th Regiment to attack the enemy in the front, on the morning of the 10th the entire detachment marched off toward Portsmouth, where we arrived at midday.

This expedition was quite trying for me. Several hours previously, I had taken medicine when I felt the fever again. To hold back its effects I had to drink red wine, which caused extreme distress. I mention this only to show the reader that one must do everything one can to perform one's duty scrupulously; and that a man, if he will, can do very much.

<sup>50</sup> [8 Brigadier General Robert Lawson, Virginia militia; he was earlier in the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Virginia Continentals (Heitman, *Officers of the Continental Army*, p. 343).]

<sup>51</sup> [9 Dr. Thomas Hall, who owned a plantation and mill located about midway along the road between Portsmouth and Suffolk, now called Jolliff Road.]

The 12<sup>th</sup> [February]. The news came in from Princess Anne County that Major Weeks was spreading ruin in the area and severely harassing the few good loyalists. The communication between Portsmouth and Great Bridge was made unsafe. Therefore General Arnold decided to send two parties there, one under Colonel Simcoe and the other under myself, in order to drive away the honorable gentleman.

In the afternoon, about four o'clock, both detachments boarded the boats at Portsmouth. The one under Colonel Simcoe consisted of two hundred foot and forty horse and landed at Norfolk. My detachment consisted of two hundred foot and thirty horse and landed at Powder Point. The colonel began marching toward Kemp's Landing, where he was to remain until I with my detachment had passed the Devil's Elbow Swamp<sup>52</sup> to his right. My purpose during this march was to take the enemy party in the rear or between us, if they had secured the passes of London, Dauge's, and Brock's bridges.<sup>53</sup> These are the three main passes of the county. Toward evening I arrived in the vicinity of Great Bridge in order to gather some information about the enemy from the commanding officer there. From here I was to try to arrange my match so that I would arrive the next morning, the 13<sup>th</sup>, in the vicinity of Brock's Bridge. During this time, the colonel would take his march toward London Bridge<sup>54</sup> to draw the enemy's attention upon himself.

I was just about to continue my march when I received an order to return immediately to Portsmouth. Three French ships of the fleet of Admiral Ternay had sailed into the mouth of the James River in order to blockade it. It was presumed that these ships intended to join the Americans in some undertaking against Portsmouth.<sup>55</sup>

In the forenoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> [February] I arrived at Powder Point, where I found the colonel with his detachment. But at this moment we received instructions to follow our original orders.

The 14<sup>th</sup> [February]. Toward midnight I received the information from a guide given to me, whom I used as a spy at the same time, that the enemy had occupied Dauge's Bridge.<sup>56</sup> I departed at once from the vicinity of Great Bridge, crossed the Devil's Elbow Swamp — two good hours wide — and about nine o'clock in the morning arrived on the other side at a plantation which belonged to a loyalist and a relative of my guide.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This is likely the large swamp/marsh area along the modern Elbow Road where Stumpy Lake was built.

<sup>53</sup> [10 London Bridge was south of Kemp's Landing, Dauge's was northwest of Brock's Bridge, and Brock's was east of James's plantation.] Note: If using the map "Plan of Princess Ann and Norfolk Counties" it must be remembered that the map is oriented south as opposed to the modern north orientation (north on top). As such, this should read: "London Bridge was north of Kemp's Landing, Dauge's was southeast of Brock's Bridge, and Brock's was west of James's plantation."

<sup>54</sup> Modern location on Potters Road between Lynnhaven Parkway and London Bridge Road.

<sup>55</sup> [11 The ships were the *Eveille*, 64 guns, the frigates *Gentille* and *Surveillance*, and the cutter *Guepe*, under Commodore Arnaud le Gardeur de Tilly, Admiral de Terney had died the previous December. Arnold withdrew his ships up the Elizabeth River, where the larger French ships were unable to follow. After de Tilly had captured the *Romulus*, 44 guns, he returned to Newport on February 25 (*Sir Henry Clinton's Narratives*, ed. Wilcox, pp. 250-53; Freeman, *George Washington*, V, 258, 261-63).]

<sup>56</sup> This modern location of this bridge is on Princess Anne Road between Holland Road and Seaboard Road.

<sup>57</sup> There is no indication of the identity of Ewald's guide but the loyalist's plantation mentioned was likely along the current Salem Road which connected Kemp's Landing with the North Landing.

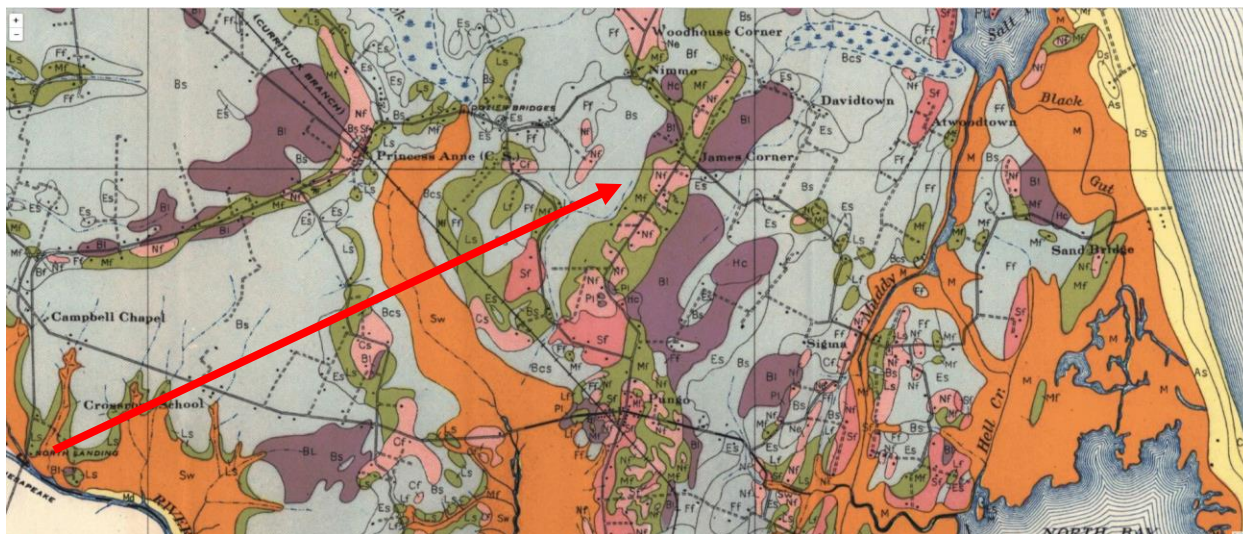


Figure 12: Soil Map of Princess Anne County showing the swamp and marsh areas (indicated in orange) crossed by Ewald's force (line showing approximate movement). The swamp and marsh areas were likely much larger as the map indicates drainage improvements made in the intervening century and a half. (University of Alabama)

This swampy woods was crossed on a very dark night, and I do not deny that I would have liked to know the distinguishing marks by which the guide directed himself. The men had to march in single file, constantly going up to their knees in the swamp. We had to climb over countless trees which the wind had blown down and that often lay crosswise, over which the horses could scarcely go. They had to be whistled at continually to prevent them from going astray. Men and horses were so worn out that they could hardly go on when I happily left this abominable region behind.

According to an arrangement, I found at the loyalist's place a note in cipher from the colonel which ordered me into the woods where the highway intersected the footpath from the swamp.<sup>58</sup> I was to conceal myself and await further news from him and from the enemy. The cause of this delay was the return of the three French warships to the mouth of the James River. I posted sentries around me and was quite glad that at least I had a passable road for retreat. For had the enemy struck me just as I reached the end of the swamp, when the strength of the men was used up, many a one who wanted to escape the misfortune of falling in impassable regions after a desperate defense could have lost his life in this miserable way.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, I remained here under two disadvantages: we had no more bread with us and could hunt up none without revealing ourselves, and I had to fear that some of my men might desert because of hunger.

<sup>58</sup> This "highway" may be the modern Salem Road or even North Landing Road.

<sup>59</sup> If Week's force was at Dauge's Bridge, the most direct route to this location noted above is via the modern Princess Anne Road to North Landing Road.



274.9.19.75.5.171. 140.5.13. 1.26.9.24<sup>2</sup>. a 125.5.115. without 174.9.32. 22.23.9.13  
 145.5.24ing. me that. 1.900.5.11 — was 151.5.15. 6me for the 145.5.28  
 55.5.34. and that he 196.9.23 a 117.9.35. 61.5.35 in the 240.5.23. of my  
 146.5.37. 11.9.38. — on the 264.5.22. 147.9.12. 112.5.12. a  
 150.5.15. to you expressing my 130.9.19 and 100.9.145. 119. that the  
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 of 141.5.95 and as soon as that shall 136.5.24. — 112.9.19. 201.5.92.1  
 250.9.32 for 19.5.24. to be 234.9.102 to me for 155.9.32 in 158.9.29. of  
 the 190.5.15 and 98.5.29. 1.101.9.32 up for my 236.5.25. at they

Figure 13: Example of an encrypted letter – similar to what Ewald would have to decode in Princess Anne County (Library of Congress)

In this situation, I resorted to a short talk in which I exhorted my men to maintain good conduct. I promised them that they would have very good subsistence after accomplishing this task.

Early on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> [February] I received a second note from the colonel, instructing me to continue the march at my discretion. I then approached Dauge's swamp in order to go through it and come out at the rear, since according to my information the enemy had occupied Dauge's Bridge. Toward three o'clock in the afternoon we had safely crossed this marshy woodland of two and a half German miles in breadth.<sup>60</sup>

Although I had crossed the first swamp with great difficulty during the night, this last passage surpassed the first one very much with respect to all hardships. The men had to wade constantly over their knees in the swampy water and climb over the most dangerous spots with the help of fallen and rotted trees. At times there were places such that if a foothold were missed, a man could have suffocated in the swamp. I had to cross a flooded, swampy cypress wood with the cavalry, a quarter of an hour further, to the right, where one had to ride continually in water over the saddle. At the end of the swamp, whither our two guides led us safely at the same time, there was a log causeway — a good quarter hour long — which because of its great holes was just as difficult for the horses and men to cross as the swamp had been.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of the causeway was a small house, which I surrounded so unexpectedly that none of its residents could escape. These people gazed in astonishment at the sight of us, when they learned the way which we had taken. I drew up here and counted my men. I had not lost a single man -thank God!

<sup>60</sup> This was likely the southern portion of today's West Neck Creek which lies between West Neck Road and Seaboard Road.

<sup>61</sup> This log causeway could also be along the portion of Indian River road that crosses this portion of the swamp and West Neck Creek.



From the occupant of the house I received the news that Major Weeks and his party had burned Dauge's Bridge and withdrawn. I threatened the man with the noose if he did not disclose to me what he knew, and at the same time I showed him several guineas which he could earn if he spoke the truth. The fear of the gallows and the love of the gold softened the heart of this man. He revealed to me that just two hours before Major Weeks with six to eight hundred men had been in the vicinity of Jamison's plantation,<sup>62</sup> three English miles (a good hour's march) from his house. To be sure, the six to eight hundred men were too many for me; however, it was now too late to change the plan, and I could not obtain assistance. Therefore I made up my mind quickly, sat down, and hurriedly made the following plan<sup>63</sup> of the area and of Weeks's camp, according to the way this man indicated to me. After I had told my men that we must fight, as we had no way to retreat, we marched at once.

Since my guide thought that the enemy could be outflanked around his left with the help of a wood, I ordered Captain Shank with thirty horse and twenty foot jagers to take the highway straight to the plantation. He was to draw the attention of the enemy upon himself from this side and skirmish with the posts existing there. But as soon as he heard the firing from my side, he was to attack with all his force.

I made my way through the wood with the 180 jagers and rangers, but I had marched scarcely eight hundred to a thousand paces when I heard strong rifle fire. The man from the small house informed me that the enemy must be situated at James's,<sup>64</sup> rather than Jamison's, plantation which was close to our left, since there was a crossroad from London Bridge and Northwest Landing at this plantation.<sup>65</sup>

I quickly formed a front on the flank and directed my men to fire a volley as soon as they caught sight of the enemy and then boldly attack the toe with the bayonet and hunting sword. I ordered the liters to disperse on both flanks and kept the rangers in close formation. We had not passed five to six hundred paces through the wood when we saw the enemy in a line facing the side of the highway to London Bridge firing freely against Captain Shank's advance. In doing so, they carelessly showed us their left flank. I got over a fence safely without being discovered by the enemy. Here I had a volley fired, blew the half-moon, and shouted Hurrah! I scrambled over a second fence and threw myself at the enemy, who was so surprised that he impulsively fled in the greatest disorder into the wood lying behind him. At this moment the gallant Captain Shank advanced with his cavalry, ably supported by Lieutenant Bickell with his twenty foot jagers. Some sixty men were either cut down or bayoneted by the infantry. We captured one captain, one lieutenant four noncommissioned officers, and forty-five men, some sound and some

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<sup>62</sup> [12 Neil and George Jamison owned a plantation of six hundred acres in Princess Anne County (*The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, ed., Edward Wilson James [New York, 1951], p. 126).]

<sup>63</sup> [13 Ewald's *Plan of the Skirmish with the Rebels at James's Plantation in Princess Anne County in Virginia*. This plan shows the deployment of Ewald's detachment through the swamp and crossroad and his attack on the American position at James's plantation.]

<sup>64</sup> [14 James's plantation is shown in the "Sketch of . . . 1781" (note 3) to the west of Brock's Bridge. Edward James owned 519 ½ acres in Princess Anne County (*The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, ed., James, p. 126).] Note: There are two "James's." The one indicated near Brock's Bridge was owned by William James (in the vicinity of today's Red Wing Park) while Edward James owned a plantation further south to the east of Nimmo Methodist Church.

<sup>65</sup> This is an important distinction between "Jamison" and "James" as James's plantation was about 1.5 miles from Ewald's location which would explain the relative surprise at finding Weeks' force so close. This crossroads is approximately where Princess Anne Road and General Booth Blvd. or possibly where Princess Anne Road and Sandbridge Road lie today.

wounded. All the baggage, along with a powder cart and a wagon loaded with weapons, was taken as booty by the men. I ordered Lieutenant Bickell with all the foot jagers to quickly follow the enemy into the wood. He followed him until night fell and brought back seven more prisoners. On my side, I had three jagers and two rangers wounded and one horse killed.

I immediately dispatched Lieutenant Holland<sup>66</sup> with four ranger dragoons to the colonel at London Bridge<sup>67</sup> in order to give him a report of the incident, and quickly took all security measures for my position at James's plantation. Now I let my men enjoy the luxuries of the American planter, who was a very rich man. At two o'clock at night Colonel Simcoe joined me.<sup>68</sup>

I learned from the prisoners that Major Weeks designated daily a rallying point where they were to reassemble after a reverse. He seldom remained in one place for twenty-four hours, and toward evening they were on the march again. Their present rendezvous was Northwest Landing. The enemy strength had been 520 men, and his people were so devoted to him that none of them were willing to enlist in our service.

The 16<sup>th</sup> [February]. In the morning the colonel's detachment arrived. He marched off at once to seek out the enemy again. The colonel went in advance with the cavalry toward Pungo Church,<sup>69</sup> and ordered me to follow slowly with the infantry because the men were very tired. This was the only road the enemy could take to the pass of Northwest Landing.

In the forenoon I arrived at Pungo Church, which lay on a height.<sup>70</sup> It was built of brick and enclosed by a wall, which made a very good post, since it was surrounded on both sides by swamps for a great distance. I found the colonel here with the cavalry. He ordered me to lay an ambush in the churchyard, and advised me to turn to the left toward Tale's [?] plantation<sup>71</sup> with the rest of the infantry and rummage through this area, since the enemy appeared to be completely scattered, according to his

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<sup>66</sup> [15 Queen's ranger's cavalry.]

<sup>67</sup> From Ewald's location, the current General Booth Blvd. to Oceana Blvd. would be the most direct route.

<sup>68</sup> [16 I could find no account of this skirmish other than Simcoe's brief statement that he "advanced on the 16<sup>th</sup> up the country, by the main road towards the north-west landing, while Capt. Ewald, by almost impossible ways and bye paths proceeded to the same point; he fortunately surprised and totally dispersed Week's party" (*Simcoe's Monthly Journal*, p. 174).]

<sup>69</sup> [17 Pungo Chapel was located to the east of Great Bridge, it no longer exists. It was the third and last Pungo Chapel, and stood about two and a half miles south of the present town of Pungo, which was named for an Indian chief. The chapel was built of brick, it was seventy-five feet long and thirty feet wide, and was completed in 1773 ("Plan des Environs de Williamsburg, York, Hampton et Portsmouth," The Papers of Rochambeau, Map Division, Library of Congress; George C. Mason, *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia* [Richmond, Va., 1945], pp. 146-48, 170).]

<sup>70</sup> Near the location of Pungo Chapel is the terminus of West Neck Road which connects to North Landing Road to the north. This road crosses West Neck Creek via a bridge and it is possible that a bridge existed during this time.

<sup>71</sup> The name "Tale" has not been found in any census, landowner records, slave holder records, or tax assessments for Princess Anne County. There is a "Taylor" (Arthur Taylor) that lived in Princess Anne County during the time and Ewald may have recorded the name wrong in his journal. In addition, there is a Tull's Creek just south of the Virginia border in North Carolina (see Figure 29). While this would be a considerable distance to travel within the movement timeline indicated by Ewald, it is possible that a family named Tull had property south of Pungo Chapel. Judging from the proximity of Tull's Creek to the Northwest River and Northwest Landing, it is possible that Ewald believed that Weeks and his force were heading in that direction to regroup after the skirmish.

information. He himself would go with the cavalry to Ackiss's plantation<sup>72</sup> to collect information about the enemy. Later, he would rejoin me in my area or recall me.

After I had laid an ambush of one officer, ten jagers, and ten rangers at Pungo churchyard, I marched to Tale's plantation. After a lapse of less than an hour, one of my flankers on the right reported to me that he had seen several sentries dressed in blue coats at a distance of several hundred paces. Now, on such an occasion, where the enemy had been alarmed previously, the usual precautions taken for reconnoitering him here would have spoiled the game in this instance. Therefore I immediately sent out the jagers in two parties, hurrying to the right and left, in order to seek out and attack the enemy. I myself took the rangers and followed the road straight toward the plantation, which I perceived in the distance. The party on the right ran into the enemy, and the other party, in accordance with previous orders, hastened to the spot where the firing broke out. I found the enemy in full flight, running through a marshy meadow to a wood. Two of their men were killed and a lieutenant with five men captured. Had Lieutenant Bickell seized another officer who stood a few paces away instead of the lieutenant, the commander of the party— Major Weeks himself— would have been captured. But since he was not as well dressed as the lieutenant, he was not taken for an officer. Just before, a jager had killed his horse.

This man, whom I had the good luck to chase all around, knew the countryside better than I could ever know it. That was evident from the positions he took, for a retreat always remained open to him in the impassable woods which he alone knew. But on this occasion, my spies were better than his; and luck, on which everything depends in war, was on my side.

I divided my force into eight small parties, followed the enemy, and rummaged through the entire terrain beyond Tale's plantation almost to Ackiss's, where eleven more men fell into my hands. Through the prisoners I collected the information that their rendezvous was in the great Dismal Swamp.

Toward evening the colonel arrived from Ackiss's, and we marched to Cornick's plantation,<sup>73</sup> where we rested for several hours during the night.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> [February] we marched to Kemp's Landing. The colonel received orders here to return to Portsmouth, where we arrived in the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The 21<sup>st</sup> [February]. Since General Arnold had convoked a large provincial assembly in Princess Anne County to persuade the inhabitants — who pretended to be good friends — to take a new oath of allegiance to England, Colonel Simcoe marched with the jagers and rangers to Kemp's Landing to protect the assemblage there. Over four hundred persons of both sexes were present, all of them over twenty-two years of age, who gladly swallowed the oath after they were earnestly assured that the King was firmly resolved to protect them continually as loyal subjects during the war with a strong corps.

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<sup>72</sup> [18 William Ackiss and Colonel John Ackiss lived in the Upper Precinct of the Eastern Shore in Princess Anne County in 1778 (*The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, ed., James, pp. 2, 28). An Ackiss plantation is shown in this area in the "Sketch of . . . 1781." Virginia Historical Society).]

<sup>73</sup> [19 Probably the plantation of John or Lemuel Cornick, shown in the "Sketch of . . . 1781." The land was patented by William Cornick in 1657 (*The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, ed., James, p. 64; Mason, *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia*, p. 143)] The Cornick plantation was located near the corner of today's Potters Road and First Colonial Road (with a sizable portion subsumed by Naval Air Station Oceans).

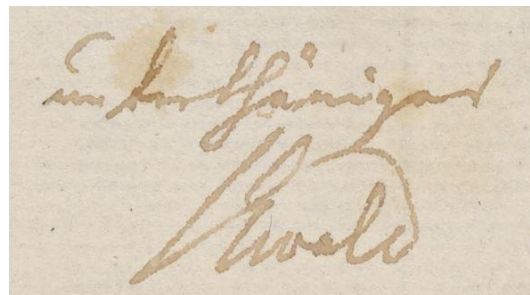
Arnold then assured the people that he would constantly sacrifice his blood and his life for them. While taking the oath, several persons made wry faces, as though they would choke on it. Nevertheless, everyone put on a good show.

During the afternoon the wealthiest and foremost inhabitants were entertained at the expense of the good King. They ate and drank fully, and all our pretended loyalist friends, whose hearts Arnold thought he had won, were in high spirits. After everything had come off peacefully, we marched back on the morning of the 23d [February].

Shortly before our departure, I breakfasted with one of the most distinguished and richest residents of this area, named Walker,<sup>74</sup> with whom I held the following conversation:

I said: “Why don’t you raise a battalion for the defense of this Area?” “You, as the first citizen of the county, can accomplish whatever you want by setting an example for your neighbors. Everyone will follow you. Uniforms and weapons will be furnished readily for the war, and these people would be very well paid.”

He replied: “I must first see if it is true that your people really intend to remain with us. You have already been in this area twice. General Leslie gave me the same assurances in the past autumn, and where is he now? In Carolina! Who knows where you will be this autumn? And should the French unite with the Americans, everything would certainly be lost to you here. What would we loyally disposed subjects have then? Nothing but misfortune from the Opposition Party, if you leave us again.”

A photograph of a handwritten signature in brown ink on a piece of aged, slightly discolored paper. The signature is written in a cursive script. The top line appears to read "Johann Ewald" and the bottom line is a large, stylized flourish or the word "Ewald".

*Figure 14: Signature of Johann Ewald (New York Public Library)*

I said: “How can you be called friends of the King if you won’t venture anything for the right cause? Look at your Opposition Party: they abandon wife, child, house, and home, and let us lay waste to everything. They fight without shoes and clothing with all passion, suffer hunger, and gladly endure all the hardships of war. But you loyalists won’t do anything! You only want to be protected, to live in peace in your houses. We are supposed to break our bones for you, in place of yours, to accomplish your purpose. We attempt everything, and sacrifice our own blood for your assumed cause.”

At this moment, a jager arrived and informed me that the rangers were marching. I took my leave and rode off.

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<sup>74</sup> [20 Probably Thomas Reynolds Walker, County Lieutenant of Princess Anne County, a wealthy and influential citizen.] Was this possibly Thomas *Walke* who owned land near Kemp’s Landing vice “Walker” who owned land close to the north end of Rudee Inlet (modern Marshview Park)?

When my blood had cooled down again, I realized that this man, who did not want to be a soldier, would have been a fool if he had acted as I had advised him. For he possessed a fortune in property of £50,000 sterling, and had for a wife one of the most charming blondes that I have ever seen in all my life!

[End of quoted material from Johann Ewald]

Ewald's account is further supported by the account of Lieutenant Colonel John Graves Simcoe. Simcoe was at London Bridge while Ewald was at James's Plantation. Simcoe later moved his forces south to join with Ewald's force. The following is an excerpt from the Simcoe's journal:<sup>75</sup>

[Start of quoted material from John Graves Simcoe]

Gen. Arnold employed the garrison in fortifying the post at Portsmouth, the primary object of his expedition: the same line to the front was occupied, which Gen. Leslie had begun. On the 29th Lt. Col. Simcoe was sent to fortify the post at Great bridge;<sup>76</sup> much lumber that was found there was floated down to Portsmouth; and the troops, with unremitted attention, applied themselves to raise a star work, which commanded the bridge and the causeway; it was intended to abate the ditch, and then to fill it with water, which, the smaller bridges being taken up, would have effectually prevented a surprise. The rebels continually fired at night on the sentinels, and perfect information was gained of a party being intended for that purpose: the extent of the post prevented any ambuscade from being laid with certainty, and the fatigue the men underwent in the day, demanded as much quiet as possible during the night. A figure was dressed up with a blanket coat, and posted in the road, by which the enemy would probably advance, and fires resembling those of a piquet, were placed at the customary distance: at midnight the rebels arrived, and fired twenty or thirty shot at the effigy. As they ran across the road they exposed themselves to the shots of two sentinels, they then went off. The next day an officer happening to come in with a flag of truce, he was shown the figure and was made sensible of the inhumanity of firing at a sentinel, when nothing farther was intended: this ridicule probably had good effects, as during the stay of the Queen's Rangers at Great bridge, no sentinel was fired at. The works being in a state of defence, and capable of receiving a garrison, the Rangers were relieved on the 5th of February, by Major Gordon with a detachment. Col. Dundas arrived that day and marched out with the Rangers, and part of the 80th: the cavalry soon fell in with a patrol, which Captain Shank pursued over Edmond's bridge, dispersing them and making an officer prisoner. The Rangers returned the next day to Portsmouth, and were constantly employed on the works till the 10th, when Gen. Arnold thought proper to detach them to Kemp's landing. The disaffected inhabitants of Princess Ann, for the most part, had left it; but it was much infested by a party under the command of a New Englander, of the name of Weeks.<sup>77</sup> To drive him from the county was the object of Lt. Col. Simcoe's march, and for this purpose, he detached Capt. Ewald with the Yagers,

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<sup>75</sup> Simcoe, *Simcoe's Military Journal. A History of the Operations of a Partisan Corps, called The Queen's Rangers*, (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1844), 173-175.

<sup>76</sup> During this time the new fort near the bridge was built to control movement of Patriot forces coming from North Carolina.

<sup>77</sup> This is the same Captain (or Major) Amos Weeks that was the object of Ewald's pursuit but it is unknown why he is characterized as a "New Englander" when it is believed that he was a Princess Anne County resident and property owner.



and a party of the Queen's Rangers to the Great bridge, and with the remainder of the corps marched to Kemp's: he advanced on the 16th up the country, by the main road towards the north-west landing, while Capt. Ewald, by almost impassable ways and bye paths proceeded to the same point: he fortunately surprised and totally dispersed Weeks's party.<sup>78</sup> The next day, Lt. Col. Simcoe proceeded with a detachment of cavalry to the north west landing: Weeks was again fallen in with, and with great difficulty escaped from the pursuit of the huzzars into a swamp. The whole corps returned the next day to Kemp's; and from thence, on the 18th, to Portsmouth. The north-west landing was the only passage from North Carolina, excepting the Great bridge, and this excursion was luckily timed. Gen. Arnold, on the 13th of February, receiving information of the arrival of three French ships of the line, had sent Lt. Col. Simcoe orders to march from Kemp's, where he then was, to the Great bridge, intimating that he should send up boats to bring off the cannon, and that the post should be withdrawn if necessary. Lt. Col. Simcoe wrote to Gen. Arnold, informing him, that he certainly should march at the time prescribed by his orders, if not countermanded, giving at the same time such reasons as to him appeared most forcible, why the Great bridge should not be hastily abandoned, but that rather Weeks and his party should be driven from the county into North Carolina; the General was pleased to approve of his reasons, and on the 16th he marched against Weeks as has been related. Gen. Arnold, in case Capt. Symonds thought it expedient, offered the army to assist in any attacks on the French fleet; Captain Alberson, the gallant master of the *Empress of Russia*, Lt. Col. Simcoe's transport, was anxious, and offered his services, to lay him and the Queen's Rangers on board any of the French ships. The army was employed in strengthening their works: on the 19th the French ships left the bay. Gen. Arnold had issued a proclamation, for the inhabitants of Princess Ann to assemble at Kemp's on the 21st:<sup>79</sup> on that day the Queen's Rangers escorted him thither; and Captain M'Kay, of that corps, was left at this post. He fortified and barricaded his quarters in the best manner possible, and having some dragoons with him kept the country clear of small parties.



Figure 15: John Graves Simcoe in a painting by William Pars, 1773 (*The Weir Foundation*)

[End of quoted material from John Graves Simcoe]

Benedict Arnold, in his report to Henry Clinton, stated that "Lieu't Colonel Simcoe, with near Four hundred Men, are in Princess Anne County, scouring the County of several parties and arranging matters with the Country people."<sup>80</sup> This coincides both with the operation to find Weeks and arranging for the upcoming assembly with the inhabitants on February 21.

<sup>78</sup> This is the Skirmish at James's Plantation.

<sup>79</sup> Ewald relates his interaction with some of the local Kemp's Landing and Princess Anne County inhabitants during this event but Simcoe does not. It is possible that Simcoe and his unit were in a duty status during this event as indicated by his mention of the Queens's Rangers "escorting" Arnold.

<sup>80</sup> Arnold to Clinton, February 13, 1781, *Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy*, 325.

There is one reference to the skirmish mentioned in a report by Princess Anne Militia General Robert Lawson:

I also received a Letter at the same time, and from the same place (North West Bridge) from Colonels Godfrey, and Thoroughgood, informing, that the number of Militia collected by them, from the Counties of Norfolk and P. Ann was inconsiderable, with which number they had join'd General Gregory, but at the same time, they acquainted me, that there was a body of Militia collected in P. Ann, who had prevented the Enemy from foraging, in small bodies, and that they had gain'd several small advantages over their foraging parties; and operated as a great check upon them in that quarter.

General Gregorys Position is a very defensible one and he has 4 Pieces of Cannon with him: and as his parties are frequently out, they check the Enemies foraging parties sent out from the Great Bridge.<sup>81</sup>

Although James's Plantation is not specifically mentioned, the timing of the letter and the circumstances of Weeks' militia meeting up with Gregory's militia forces in North Carolina corroborate the movement of Weeks after the Skirmish. Gregory had a camp in the Dismal Swamp. This allowed Gregory easy access to observe the British post at Portsmouth and gather intelligence and to rally any movements to counter any British movement from Portsmouth.

Another series of interesting sources which might also corroborate the skirmish comes from the militia who may have fought in the skirmish. Applicants for Revolutionary War pensions were required to detail their time in service and list units, commanders, or battles fought in to support their claims.

One claim from John Brown, a resident of Princess Anne County, who was 73 years old when he filed his claim in 1832, stated: "he joined Capt Amos Weeks company in which he served six months. that during this tour of duty he was part of his time in Princess Ann and partly in N Carolina. that while in Princess Ann his duty was to watch the motions of the enemy, prevent his pundering the inhabitants and his carrying off Slaves. And while in N Carolina the company to which he was attached cooperated with the American army in that place."<sup>82</sup> While the passage time and the onset of old age may have clouded the details, and dates, of Brown's statement, what he describes is similar to the movement of Weeks' militia in 1781. Although Brown lists being attached to Lieutenant John Hamilton's company in 1781, he also mentions being attached to Weeks' unit during the 1778 capture of Josiah Phillips. Either way, Brown's statement gives a good indication of the active nature of Weeks' operations that supports Ewald's *Diary* entries on Weeks.

Another pension claim comes from William Bryan of Rockingham County. Aged 70 at the time of his filing in 1832, Bryan stated he was "stationed principally in the neighbourhood of Portsmouth, and by a fort in that vicinity which was in possession of the British. During this tour he was engaged in a considerable skirmish with a party of the enemy who made a sally from the fort and was engaged in

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<sup>81</sup> "To Thomas Jefferson from Robert Lawson, 15 February 1781," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-04-02-0776>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 4, 1 October 1780–24 February 1781, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, pp. 616–618.].

<sup>82</sup> Pension Application of John Brown, S6753. <http://www.revwarapps.org/>.

another skirmish in Princess Anne County.”<sup>83</sup> This skirmish could very well be the one at James’s Plantation.

The Virginia House of Delegates determined that a petition for relief presented by William Hill “in consideration of the loss of his right arm whilst serving as a volunteer in a corps commanded by Captain Amos Weeks from the county of Princess Anne, is reasonable; and that the petitioner ought to be allowed half pay for his present relief from the time he was wounded, to the 8th instant; and also, that he ought to be put on the list of pensioners.”<sup>84</sup> Although the circumstances behind losing the arm are not articulated it is additional evidence of the activity in Weeks’ units.

The claim by Thomas Bonney, who entered the militia as a substitute for John Fentress when he was fifteen, indicates he started as a guard at the “salt house” where duty consisted of “preventing the enemy from plundering the country of cattle and other stock.” His association with Amos Weeks was as a 12-month volunteer where they had “a skirmish with the enemy at Juniper swamp. The enemy made their escape owing to the thickness of the woods and they learned from an American whom they had forced to conduct them and who escaped, that twenty men were killed.”<sup>85</sup> This skirmish may or may not have been the one at James’s Plantation. The area in the vicinity of James’s Plantation, particularly south of it along the North Landing River was sometimes referred



Figure 16: Location of the Salt House and Guard House at Rudee Inlet  
(Library of Congress)

to as Juniper Swamp although there were several areas around the Great Dismal Swamp and southward that bear similar names. The Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal, now running through the area that Ewald’s and Weeks’ forces would have crossed in their movements, is sometimes called the “Juniper Waterway.” The tactic used by Ewald in forcing locals as guides was used in the movements to James’s Plantation and in Bonney’s account. Ewald reports that while he had several men wounded, none were killed. Regardless, Bonney’s account supports the “cat and mouse” game played between Ewald and Weeks throughout the Princess Anne and surrounding countryside.

Another interesting account comes from Commodore Richard O’Brien of the Virginia State Navy.

“I had been at Princess Anne and Norfolk counties when the British Arnold, Simcoe and Dundas ravaged those counties, and found the citizen militia under the orders of Col.

<sup>83</sup> Pension Application of William Bryan, S6760. <http://www.revwarapps.org/>

<sup>84</sup> Journal entry Friday, December 19, 1783. *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, (Richmond, VA: Thomas W. White, 1828), 74.

<sup>85</sup> Pension Application of Thomas Bonney, S6688 in John Frederick, compiler, *Virginia Revolutionary Pension Applications*, 8, (Washington, DC, 1963), 44.

Matthews, Thoroughgood, Robinson, Walker, and Weeks, Lawson, etc.; and when we were drove out to Blackwater Bridge, I then had the command of the artillery, when all came under the orders of General Gregory of North Carolina. I quitted the same with dispatches for Richmond, crossed the Lynnhaven Bay, after burning the bridges in Norfolk County.”<sup>86</sup>

O’Brien does not specifically mention James’s Plantation but his identification of Simcoe and Weeks – two significant figures in the activity in Princess Anne County - indicated that he may have been involved in some of the ongoing activities against the British. General Gregory is also a significant name as his North Carolina forces worked in conjunction with various Virginia militia units in offensive and defensive operations against Arnold.

Surprisingly, the Skirmish at James’s Plantation actually appeared in an eighteenth century manual of partisan warfare. The work, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, by Johann Ewald himself, references his clash with Amos Weeks’ militia and their subsequent escape through the swamps of Virginia and North Carolina. Because Ewald did not specifically mention James’s plantation in his guidelines on “How to Act Upon a March” the event would remain anonymous for many more decades. As Ewald described the event:<sup>87</sup>

If there is certain knowledge of the area where the enemy detachment to be beaten stays, a different disposition can be made. The corps or detachment is divided into two, maybe three groups, each of which is instructed as to where to retreat to in case it is attacked by the enemy. However, the location of each of them has to be such as to allow the easy support of it by the other two if it should be attacked, or so that the group attacked can lure the enemy to the vicinity where the other groups are, which will bring the enemy into a crossfire where it will certainly be defeated. If time and area permit an attack on the enemy from more than one side, this opportunity must never be lost sight of. Thus during the Virginia campaign Colonel Simcoe was sent by General [Benedict] Arnold from Portsmouth<sup>88</sup> across the Elizabeth River into Princess Anne County to search for and destroy an enemy detachment which had badly mistreated the royalist subjects.<sup>89</sup> It also often interfered with the foraging of Arnolds corps and made communications on land and water between Portsmouth and the great bridge very unsafe. The colonel took his way across Kemp’s Landing and the London Bridge while I was sent with another detachment on Simcoe’s right toward the great bridge. From this post I turned left and passed Dauge’s and Brock’s swamps, which were considered impassable by the enemy, especially for cavalry, in order to cut off the retreat of the enemy toward Northwest Landing or in the direction of North Carolina. Both parties met the enemy detachment at

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<sup>86</sup> Richard O’Brien to James Monroe, February, 1822, in Henry S. Randall, ed., *The Life of Thomas Jefferson*, 1 (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865): 324-325.

<sup>87</sup> Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, Translation, Introduction, and Annotation by Robert A. Selig and David Curtis Skaggs, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 81. The notes included in the published version have been retained with the original notations in [ ].

<sup>88</sup> [9. Ewald spells the name as "Portsmuht "]

<sup>89</sup> [10. Ewald consistently uses the term *die koniglich gesinnten* ("royalists") when he speaks of the king's supporters during the war. Rather than switching to the modern term "loyalist," we have maintained Ewald's usage.]

two different times, through which it was completely cut to pieces, and what was left retreated through pathless swamps toward North Carolina.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, centuries before the modern inhabitants of Princess Anne County learned the details of the Skirmish at James's Plantation, Prussian military strategists such as Carl von Clausewitz and Gerhard von Scharnhorst were recommending Ewald's work, with the James's Plantation vignette above, to their students.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> [11. The Great Bridge, located south of Portsmouth, on the Elizabeth River, Norfolk County, Virginia, was the site of a critical engagement December 9, 1775, where Virginia soldiers repulsed an attack of British regulars. The defeat forced the British to evacuate and burn Norfolk (Marshall and Peckham, *Campaigns*, pp. 10-11). Five years later, when the British returned, it remained an important defensive position covering troops at Portsmouth. So long as General Arnold's or Lord Cornwallis' troops used Portsmouth as their base, controlling the Great Bridge was essential. It would be the site of several stiff engagements between the British and American troops commanded by Brigadier General Isaac Gregory and Major Amos Weeks (Ewald, *Diary*, pp. 276-80, 287-88, map, p. 257). Ewald wrote "Camp's Landing" for "Kemp's Landing," now Kempsville in Virginia Beach. The *Diary*, p. 278, describes it as consisting "of ninety dwellings, and is a trading place because of its location\* It lies close to the source of the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River. This episode is described in the *Diary*, pp. 279-80. The London Bridge was south of Kemp's Landing. For Dauge's and Brock's swamps Ewald wrote "Dowse's" and "Brok's."]

<sup>91</sup> Ewald, *Treatise*, p. 3.

## Locating James's Plantation

Despite the detailed nature of Ewald's journal, pinpointing the exact location of James's Plantation is troublesome. Modern development in the area has erased any signs of the original James's Plantation and even archaeological evidence in the form of wells, garbage pits, or building foundations are likely permanently lost.

A standard cartographic practice today is to place "North" at the top of a map or chart. Only a few of Ewald's maps contained in his journal are oriented north and likewise, his map of James's Plantation is not north oriented. Assuming that the labels of the roads are written in "from" "to" fashion, we can label the geographic location where that road leads as follows:

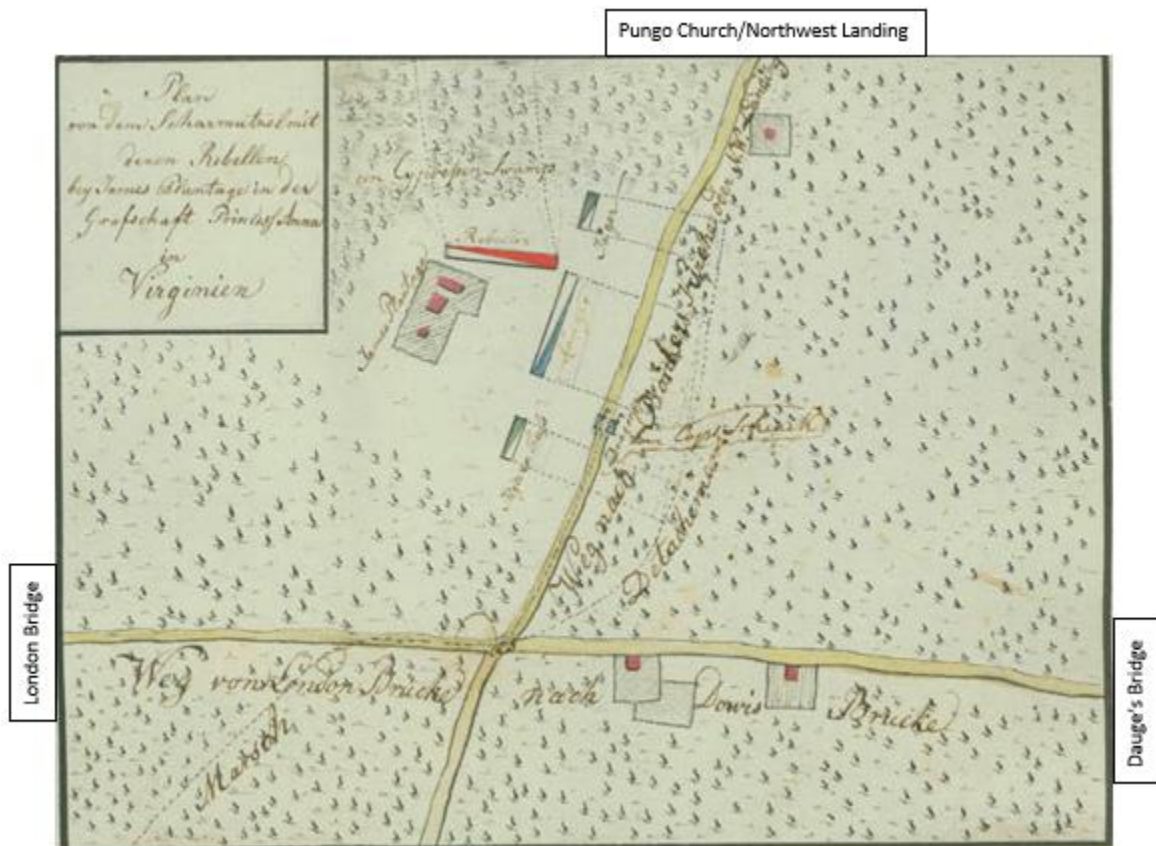


Figure 17: Ewald map with geographic locations indicated (Ewald Diary)

When this map is reoriented with "north" at the top, the relative direction to the locations listed is obtained. One additional road heading northwest can also be identified – that leading to the Jonathan Woodhouse home.



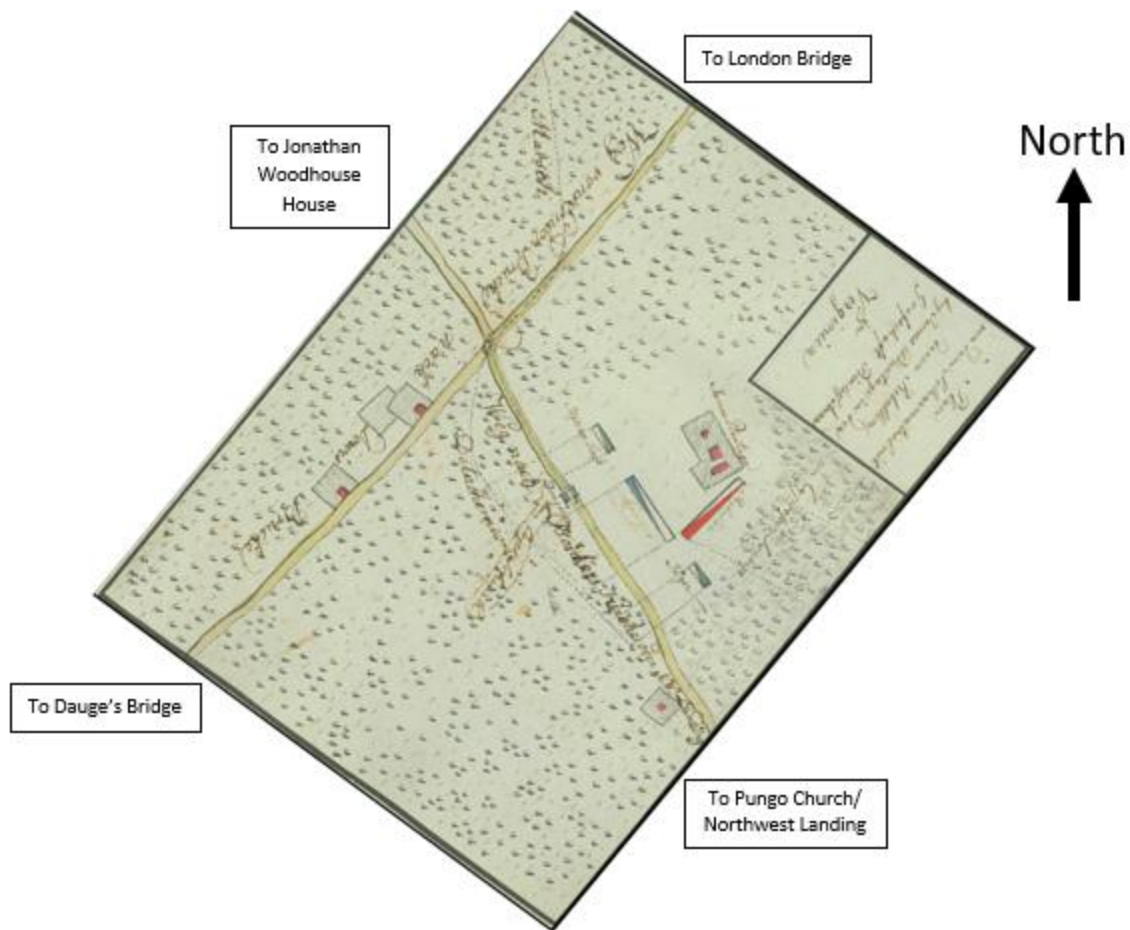


Figure 18: Ewald map oriented north (Ewald Diary)

The Jonathan Woodhouse home was built around 1770. It is likely that the road going to this home was more of a long “driveway” than an established travel route (or an actual road but dead ending at the Woodhouse estate). It was not until after the Revolutionary War that this road was extended and eventually connected to Kemp’s Landing.<sup>92</sup>

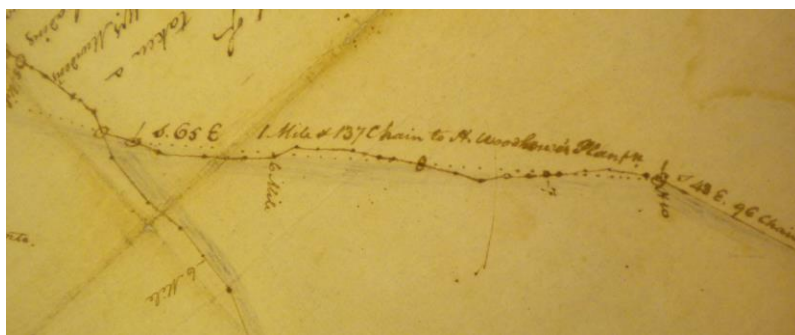


Figure 19: Proposed road showing direction of Woodhouse Plantation (Library of Virginia)

<sup>92</sup> See July 8, 1784 entry, “Princess Anne County Loose Papers, 1700-1789,” John Harvie Creecy, ed., *Virginia Antiquary*, 1, (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1954), 136-37.

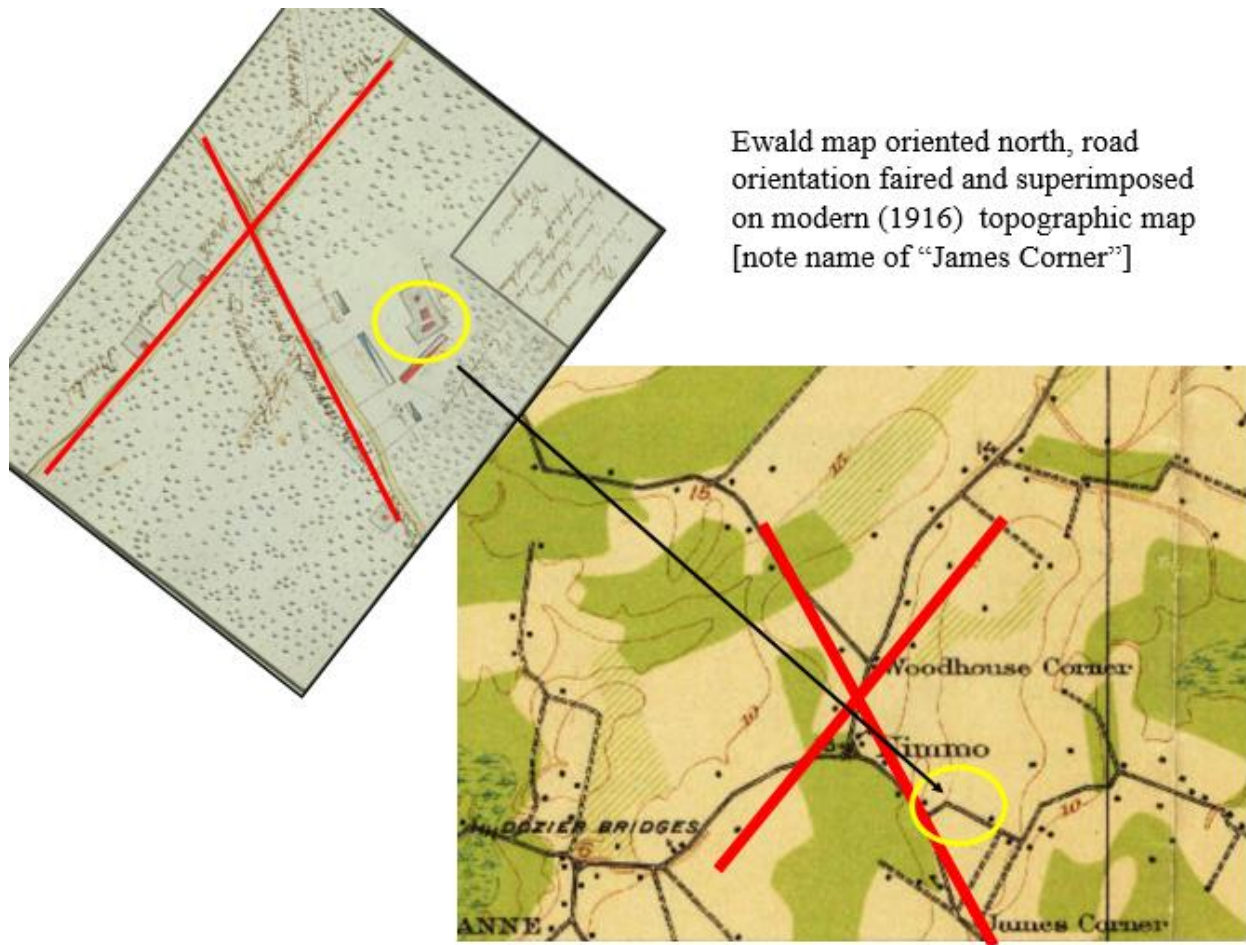


Figure 20: Composite map showing possible road orientation.

The diagram above which overlays Ewald’s map on a modern (1916) map straightens out the roads in the area of James’s Plantation. The modern map is to scale where the Ewald map is not (or the actual scale is unknown). Note the area called “James Corner” which is at the modern intersection of Princess Anne Road, Upton Road and Sandbridge Road. Also Dauge’s Bridge is now called “Dozier Bridge.”

Based on historic topographic maps, there had historically been a house or structure in the area circled that may have been the home of Edward James. His plantation would have been in the immediate surrounding area.



James's Plantation likely in this area

Figure 21: Coast Survey map showing location of skirmish site in 1862 (Library of Congress)

The A.D. Bache's Survey of Coast of North Carolina and Virginia, February 1862, map (Figure 19) shows the same relative orientation of the roads near James's Plantation. Actual structures are shown and this is the earliest map found that shows a structure in that location. If one of these structures was James's residence, it assumes that the structure was built or existed before the Revolutionary War (or at least before 1781). Many times if a house or building was rebuilt or replaced it was over the existing foundation or at least near the previous structure. James's Plantation may have had several additional buildings such as barns or storehouses around the homestead.

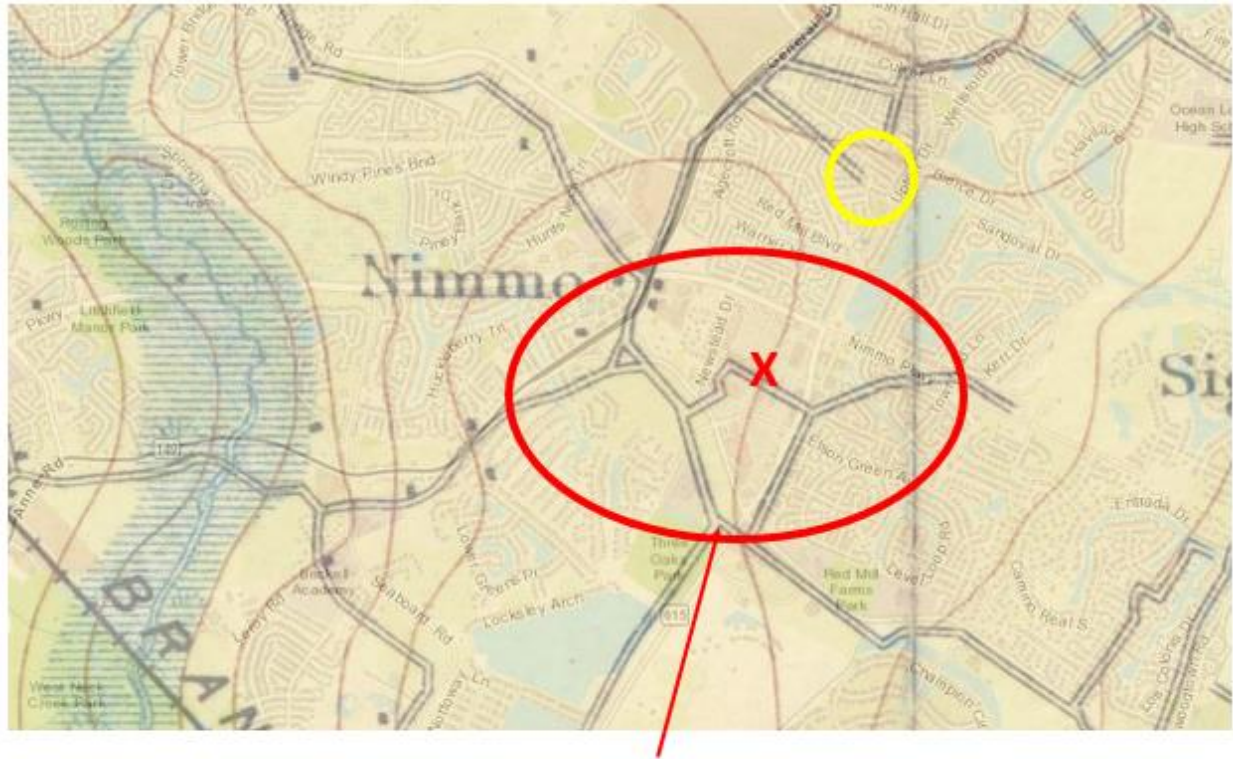
The building circled in yellow may be the home of Edward James's son, John James. As explained in *Old Houses of Princess Anne Virginia*, around 1792, "an Edward James, living near the present Nimmo Church, made his will. By this will he devised to his son Joshua the house and certain



Figure 22: John James House, 1798 (*Old Houses of Princess Anne*)



acres of his manor plantation, the remaining acres he devised to his son John. During the course of the next fifteen years, or in 1798, John built his home.”<sup>93</sup>



James Corner (modern intersection of Princess Anne Road, Upton Drive and Sandbridge Road)

Figure 23: Composite map showing modern street map overlaid on 1916 topographic map.

While the “X” shows the supposed James’s Plantation off Elson Green Drive (or near the current Home Depot and Target) the reality is the actual home could have been one of the several structures in the vicinity and the skirmish anywhere within this broad area.

The yellow circle show the area of the John James house built in 1798. The house still stands at this location (modern address is: 2180 Roswell Drive).

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<sup>93</sup> Sadie Scott Kellam and V Hope Kellam, *Old Houses in Princess Anne Virginia*, (Portsmouth, VA: Printcraft Press, 1958), 135.

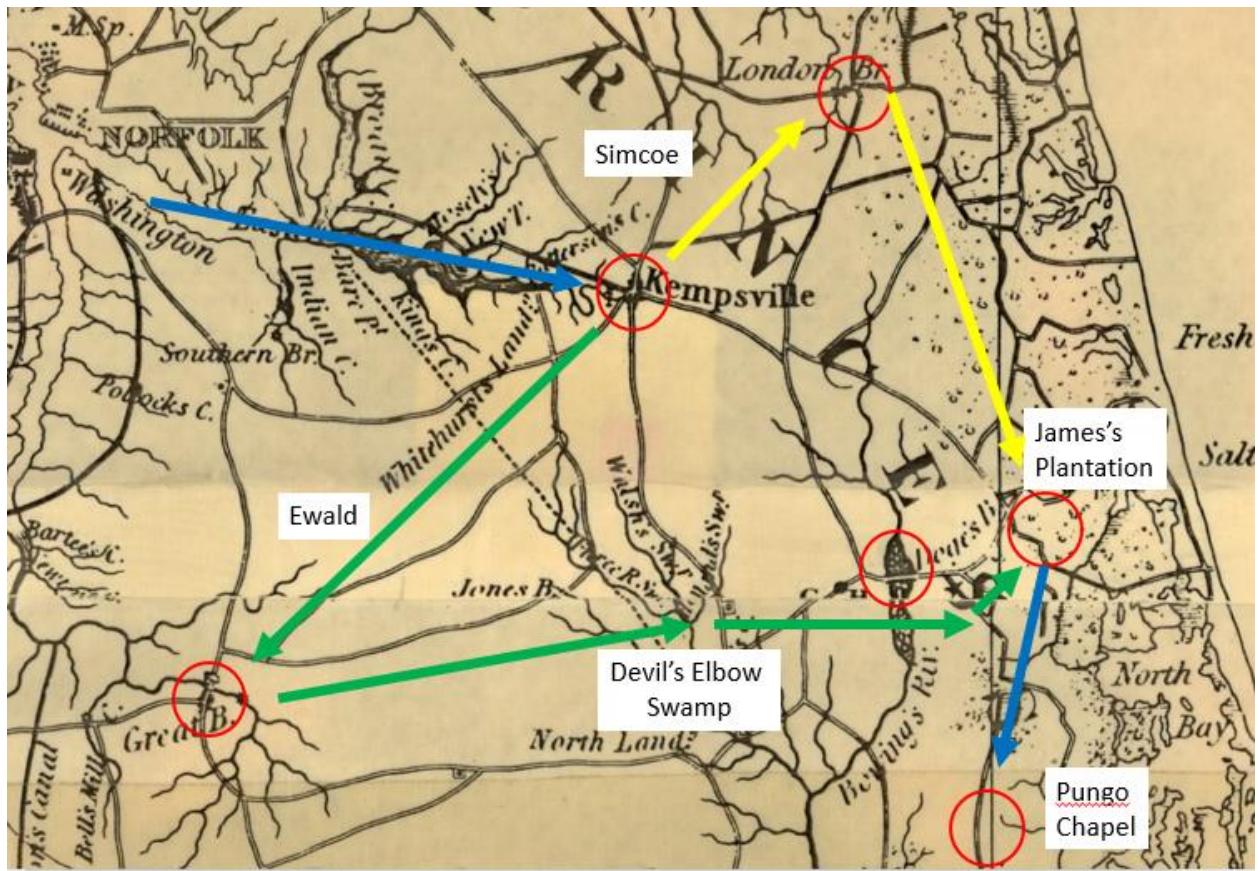


Figure 24: Movement of Ewald's and Simcoe's forces leading to the Skirmish at James's Plantation

The map above lays out the movement of Simcoe's and Ewald's forces. Upon departing Portsmouth they proceeded to Kemp's Landing as a combined force (blue arrow). Simcoe proceeded to London Bridge (yellow arrow) while Ewald proceeded to the Great Bridge (green arrow). Ewald then crossed the Devil's Elbow Swamp then the swamp south of Dauge's Bridge (which was burned by the Patriots). Ewald then found himself a short distance from James's Plantation and the Patriot force under Amos Weeks. Upon the successful skirmish at James's Plantation, Simcoe proceeded from London Bridge to join with Ewald (yellow arrow). Together the combined force proceeded south to the Pungo Chapel (blue arrow) with Simcoe leading and Ewald's forces following behind in case Weeks appeared in the rear.







Ewald met up with Simcoe at the Ackiss plantation. The house of Francis Ackiss is documented as being just south of today's intersection of Indian River Road and Princess Anne Road. Whether this was the Ackiss plantation is not known.



*Figure 26: Francis Ackiss house on Pungo Ridge Road (Library of Congress)*

From this point the forces headed north to the Cornick plantation to the east of the London Bridge near the corner of the modern Potters Road and First Colonial Road. Resting overnight at Cornick's they then proceeded back to Kemp's Landing and then back to Portsmouth. They likely utilized the established road network and the return to Kemp's via London Bridge was the quickest route as Dauge's Bridge was burned by Weeks making the more southerly route impassible (unless going through the surrounding swamps).



*Figure 27: Cornick House near Potters Road and Colonial Road (Library of Congress)*

Confidence in the location. The projected location of James's Plantation detailed above is determined to be fairly accurate. Another plantation owned by another James (William James) was ruled out as the location as it was too far north of where Ewald's geography placed the skirmish. William James's plantation was located near the modern Red Wing Park. This location may have been the intended marching point of Ewald as he indicated it was "three English miles" away. While he may have thought Jameson's Plantation was three miles away, the other "James's" plantation is about three miles away and close to the location of Brock's Bridge which was Ewald's original destination (this misunderstanding between "Jameson" and "James" may have simply been a language barrier issue although it is evident that Ewald had a very good command of the English language). As Ewald exited Dauge's swamp, somewhere is the vicinity of Seaboard Road, the James's Plantation where he engaged Weeks would have been an appropriate distance away per Ewald's estimates increasing the likelihood that this location was the site of the skirmish.



Figure 28: The 1963 aerial imagery shows the agricultural nature of this section of Princess Anne County. Landmarks that can be identified include:

- 1 – James's Plantation (no longer standing)
- 2 – John James House (1792) (still standing)
- 3 – Hickman House (1832) (still standing but moved slightly north from original location)
- 4 – Nimmo Church (1792) (still standing)
- 5 – James Corner (now intersection of Princess Anne Road, Sandbridge Road and Upton Drive)
- 6 – Unknown structure (no longer standing)
- 7 – Unknown structure (no longer standing)

It is not known if unknown structure 6 and 7 existed during the skirmish or if they played some role in the event. (map from [aerialimagery.com](http://aerialimagery.com))

## The Meeting at Kemp's Landing

Ewald mentions the assembly in Princess Anne County called by Benedict Arnold to “persuade the inhabitants—who pretended to be good friends—to take a new oath of allegiance to England.”<sup>95</sup> This assembly took place at Kemp’s Landing and was reminiscent of the event hosted by Lord Dunmore in 1775 following the Skirmish at Kemp’s Landing. This may have taken place at the Singleton House and although the actual date of construction of the residence varies depending on the source, the house was definitely present in Kemp’s Landing in 1781.<sup>96</sup>



Figure 29: Singleton House - Kemp's Landing (Library of Congress)

One known Princess Anne County resident in attendance was Edward Hack Moseley, Sr. who was a known Loyalist.<sup>97</sup> Moseley reportedly received a personal invitation from Arnold to attend this particular event. It was likely that Arnold was seeking Moseley’s standing and influence in the community to help sway the loyalty of the county toward the British. By promising protection to the Loyalists of Princess Anne, Arnold could go forth and recruit its residents to be part of his “American Legion.” Arnold stated in his recruitment proclamation: “His Excellency Sir Henry CLINTON has authoriz'd me to raise a corps of cavalry and infantry, who are to be clothed, subsisted, and paid as the other troops are in the

British service; and those who bring in horses, arms, or accoutrements, are to be paid their value, or have liberty to sell them.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite obtaining oaths of loyalty from many of the residents in attendance at his gathering, Arnold likely realized that obtaining the loyalty of Princess Anne County was going to be difficult. When Major General William Phillips arrived in March, he quickly drew his own impression of the situation:

I come now to the Norfolk and Princess Ann counties, where we cannot much depend for assistance. They are timorous, cautious, at best, but half friends, and perhaps some, if not many, concealed enemies. Supposing them perfectly ours, we should not be able to arm more than five or six hundred men, who would become a charge to us while we remained, and being left, would be undone. At present, they act a sort of saving game, but are of no use to us.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 286.

<sup>96</sup> Virginia Beach Historical Register, *Pleasant Hall*, <https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/planning/boards-commissions-committees/Pages/VB%20Historical%20Register/Pleasant-Hall.aspx>.

<sup>97</sup> “Families of Lower Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties: Moseley Family of lower Norfolk County,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 5, no. 3 (Jan 1898): 332.

<sup>98</sup> “American Legion, Arnold’s Proclamation,” *The Royal Gazette*, (New York), October 25th, 1780.

<sup>99</sup> Observations of William Phillips to Henry Clinton, April 3, 1781, in Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., *The Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy*, 1, (London: Charing Cross, 1888), 379.

Arnold would later echo a similar sentiment adding that they “are not inclined to be active in our favor.”<sup>100</sup> The Skirmish at James’s Plantation, frequent attacks on the post at Portsmouth, and other militia activities in the surrounding area gave Arnold cause for concern where he shifted his operations from disrupting militia activities in the region to bolstering his defenses at Portsmouth.

The challenge for the British now became how to protect the Loyalists who swore oaths to the king. The six hundred or so effective troops that they might be able to recruit from the county, while not insignificant in number, pressed on the resourcing required to maintain the post at Portsmouth and simultaneously protect the area Loyalists. Arnold and Phillips concluded:

The Post of Portsmouth, which we conceive to be a bad one taken only in one View, that of the Number of Troops, necessary to defend it. There are many other Points which render the Post weak, which an order has been given by Major General Phillips to the commanding Engineer to delineate. We imagine that to protect Princess Anne County, and to have a Point for Troops to resort to, and for Expeditions in the Chesapeake to be sent from; a Post for Six hundred or one Thousand Men might be established elsewhere to more Advantage than this of Portsmouth.

The answer was Princess Anne County. The Lynnhaven Bay provided protection to anchors ships operating in the Chesapeake, defense from Patriot forces was possible, and supply and foraging from the local area was readily available. The post in Princess Anne never materialized, but when the post at Portsmouth was finally evacuated, General Charles O’Hara, second in command to Cornwallis reported, “It is unavoidable, I am bringing you all the inhabitants of Princess Anne and Norfolk Counties. What an unfortunate scrap they are in!”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Joint Letter from Major General Phillips and Brigadier General Arnold, April 18, 1781, *ibid.*, 412.

<sup>101</sup> O’Hara to Cornwallis, August 15, 1781, in Ian Saberton, ed., *Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theater of the American Revolutionary War*, (Uckfield, England: The Naval & Military Press, Ltd., 2010), 6:51.

## After The Skirmish

The remnants of Weeks' militia forces headed to their rendezvous with General Gregory's North Carolina forces at the Dismal Swamp Camp via the North West Landing. Attempts by the now combined Ewald and Simcoe force to intercept the militia succeeded in only capturing a few stragglers.<sup>102</sup> Amos Weeks, however, would continue to torment the British and proved to be a particular irritant to Johann Ewald. Weeks narrowly avoided capture at Pungo Chapel but one of Ewald's troops did manage to kill his horse.

Early in March, 1781, Gregory's force was positioned to threaten the British outpost at Great Bridge. As part of the reinforcements, Ewald and a Captain M'Kay proceeded to Kemp's Landing then to Great Bridge along the road connecting the two locations. Ewald's force, leading the movement, was engaged with a quick volley while in the rear an ambush awaited M'Kay's force. A couple of militia were captured who revealed they were part of Week's unit.<sup>103</sup>

Ewald was injured during an attack on the post at Portsmouth on March 19<sup>th</sup> near Scott's Creek. While Weeks may not have been part of this attack, it does show the efforts the Americans were placing on the British. By May, Ewald reported that Weeks was active again in Princess Anne County and had "severely mistreated the inhabitants who had renewed their oath of allegiance under Arnold."<sup>104</sup> Weeks also threatened to burn the hospital at Norfolk which housed a combination of wounded British and captured Patriot prisoners. He even continued to torment Ewald: "Once he sent word to me through a wench that he hoped to square accounts with me again in Norfolk."<sup>105</sup>

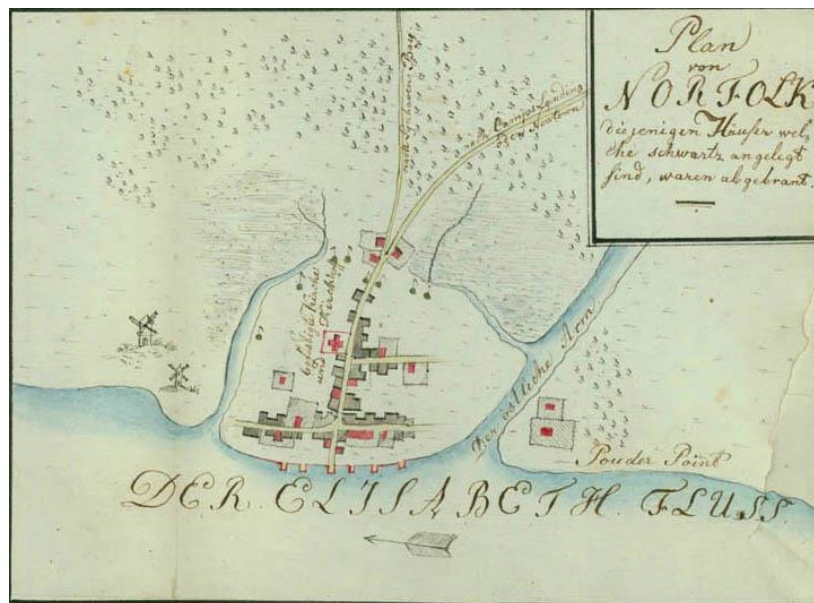


Figure 30: Norfolk in 1781 showing the hospital (Ewald Diary)

<sup>102</sup> Ewald, *Diary*, 285.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.



It is at this point that Ewald moves on toward Yorktown to join with Cornwallis' force. Weeks, however, continued his bold activities in the region. General Isaac Gregory provided a statement regarding the capture of a British galley in the Currituck Sound. As Gregory reported:

Some time in April, 1781, Captain Weeks and Killam were at Morse's Point in Currituck County in this State near the Line of Virginia in Princess Anne Coutny. They saw a Galley come too near the land. They went down and the Commander of the Galley, to-wit: Robinson came on shore and enquired how he should find the first British post. Weeks & Killam informed him that they were British officers and that they would conduct him to Camp. Accordingly they employed one Munden to pilot them up to my Camp at North West, telling him that it was a British Post. The Pilot proceeded with the Galley as fast as possible. Weeks and Killam prevailed on Robinson to cross at a place called the Launch and go with them by land to my Camp, though he believed that it was a British Camp.

As the Galley was on her way, she unfortunately met an Oyster boat which she hailed and asked who commanded at the North West. Being informed that I did, she immediately seized the Pilot, put him in Irons, along with several of Captain Bostar's crew, having discovered the deception they were under, rowed back with all possible expedition and went to some place in Mattamuskeet where they left her.

As soon as Weeks and Killam came to Camp with Captain Robinson they informed me how they had managed the matter. I endeavoured to intercept the boat's retreat, but it was too late.

Robinson, the old Captain, seemed to be in high spirits to think he had so perfectly his purpose, not doubting but he was really in a British Camp until the evening. He gave all the information respecting the Rebels he could, and told me that they took the Galley by surprise in the night, and he being appointed Captain, wanted a Commission and hoped he had not done amiss in taking her before he had obtained one.

You may depend that Robinson and all his crew were not only disaffected, but were as grand a set of Tories as men can be.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Isaac Gregory to Thomas Burke, March 31, 1782, Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, 16, (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Bros., Book and Job Printers, 1898), 260-61.



Figure 31: 1770 Map of the Virginia-North Carolina border showing the route to North Carolina via the Great Bridge (Library of Congress)

Benedict Arnold was replaced as the commander of British forces in Virginia by Major General William Phillips on March 27, 1781. Arnold would act as Phillips' second, conducting additional raids and activities up the James River as far as Petersburg, until Phillips died on May 13th possibly of typhoid.<sup>107</sup> Arnold resumed command for only a week until General Charles Cornwallis arrived from South Carolina on May 20<sup>th</sup> and set up his headquarters at Yorktown. Arnold returned to New York and led one expedition in Connecticut before heading to England to live out his life in ignominy.<sup>108</sup>

Johann Ewald recovered from his wound and joined the British at Yorktown. His jager corps was one of the units that surrendered to the victorious American and French forces where he was placed on parole. Ewald spent the next two years on Long Island and returned to Prussia in 1783.

Thomas Dundas and John Graves Simcoe also joined Cornwallis at Yorktown and surrendered as well. Dundas would later serve as the Governor of Guadeloupe while Simcoe would become the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada.

Amos Weeks appeared to be a larger than life individual. He was well respected by his militia troops and his leaderships and bravery undoubtedly inspired the local militias to perform well against a much better trained and experienced force.

The significance of the Skirmish at James's Plantation lies not in the simple Hessian victory over the Princess Anne Militia, but in the continued series of disruptions caused by locals, such as Amos

<sup>107</sup> For more on these additional British raids, movements, and actions in Virginia see Michael Cecere, *Invasion of Virginia, 1781*, and John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783*.

<sup>108</sup> Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, "A Traitor's Epiphany: Benedict Arnold in Virginia and His Quest for Reconciliation," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 125, no. 4 (2017): 314-357.

Weeks, on the larger strategic British plan for the Southern Campaign. Cornwallis' operations in North and South Carolina continued to be met with mixed success prior to Benedict Arnold's arrival in Virginia. Arnold's operations were designed to both disrupt logistical support provided by Virginia to the Continental Army (in both the Middle and Southern states) and to create a forward base of operations for the British at Portsmouth to help support the continued Southern Campaign.

Arnold's initial raid into Richmond, and follow-on raids to Petersburg and other areas along the James River had only a minimal effect on disrupting the logistical operations for the Continental Army. Stockpiles of stores were too numerous and spread out over too large of an area for Arnold's (and later Phillips') forces to destroy or interdict. Confined to areas along the main route of travel, via the James River, the raids only produced a favorable short-term effect.

Additionally, the advanced base of operations envisioned for Portsmouth quickly showed the flaws in its design. The Elizabeth River was simply too shallow for many of the larger British warships to sail leaving them exposed in Hampton Roads. While there was little naval opposition from either the Continental Navy or the Virginia Navy (the Virginia Navy base at Chickahominy and ships at Osbourns being destroyed in earlier raids), the whereabouts of the French Navy was unknown and posed the biggest threat.

Complicating the entire British plan, however, was the presence of Benedict Arnold. No one could be certain where his loyalties lied and this may have led his superiors and fellow commanders to view his actions and reports with caution. Even Arnold's goal of recruiting local Loyalists to build his force was a failure. His overconfidence in believing that many would flock to his leadership, and even his orders to his troops to respect private property, were met with suspicion. The bottom line – no one seemed to like Benedict Arnold at this point.

When Lord Cornwallis arrived in Virginia, Arnold advised him to establish his base at Richmond but instead Cornwallis chose Yorktown as his desired location to regroup his forces and await reinforcements for the next campaign. The only significant advantage of Yorktown over Portsmouth was that Yorktown was a deep water port capable of handling even the largest British warships. While defensible, Yorktown could also be easily blockaded.

Arnold's job was made even harder by the likes of Amos Weeks, who was able to recruit and lead the Patriots time and time again against several of the British operations. The combined efforts of Weeks, Gregory, and Von Steuben ultimately made the British position in Portsmouth so untenable that the British had to look for a post elsewhere. The Skirmish at James's Plantation played no small part in demonstrating the mettle of local forces and their ability to fight using terrain and maneuver to their advantage in order to disrupt the British objectives.

## Appendix A - Who is Amos Weeks?

Assembling a biography of Amos Weeks has proven very elusive. Piecing together the accounts of Ewald, Simcoe, and some of his militia forces and contemporaries it is evident that Amos Weeks was a militia leader of high capabilities and leadership skills. While he led the troops in the Princess Anne Militia there is some ambiguity as to whether or not he was an actual resident of Princess Anne County. Simcoe referred to him as a “New Englander” but in several of the pension applications for Revolutionary War service, his former troops indicate that they had served under him as early at 1776, perhaps even 1775 (the recollections of aged individuals some 30 plus years after the fact may have obfuscated some of the finer details of Weeks’ service).

On May 27, 1778, Weeks was paid 180 pounds, 17 shillings and 7 pence “for pay, &c., of his Comp’y Princess Ann Militia.”<sup>109</sup> This was likely for militia expenses incurred in 1777 and early 1778. Later in 1778, Weeks was known to have captured the renegade Josiah Phillips. He was recognized for this effort as “A Warrant was issued for One hundred & fifty pounds payable to Mr. John Thoroughgood for the use of a Volunteer Company commanded by Captain Amos Weeks being the reward offered by Government for apprehending Josiah Phillips.”<sup>110</sup>

In Princess Anne County, we do find documentation of his January 22, 1779 marriage to Elizabeth Keeling where his surrogate was George Jamison, Jr., whose plantation Ewald thought Weeks’ militia force was initially located.<sup>111</sup> This marriage would indicate that Amos Weeks was likely a frequent visitor to the Keeling home, still located today off Adam Keeling Drive, called “Ye Dudlies”. The home was also the temporary residence of a French officer named Major William Galvan assigned as the personal messenger of George Washington in communicating with the French fleet (see Appendix B). This brought Amos Weeks into the larger intelligence network operating in Princess Anne County.



Figure 32: "Ye Dudlies" home of the Keeling Family (Library of Congress)

<sup>109</sup> "Virginia Militia in the Revolution," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 15, no. 2 (Oct., 1907): 193.

<sup>110</sup> Journal Entry, Thursday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1778, H.R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the Council of the State of Virginia*, 2, (Richmond, VA: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1931), 210.

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth B. Wingo, compiler, *Marriages of Princess Anne County, Virginia: 1749-1821*, (Norfolk, VA: Elizabeth B. Wingo, 1961), 103.

Amos Weeks was committed to independence and while the British may have deemed him a “rebel” he was somewhat of a rebel in his personal life as well. The court papers for Princess Anne County contain numerous mentions of Amos Weeks on both sides of the courtroom. For example:

Nov. 1779. Grand jury presents Amos Weeks & Edward Cannon for suffering a body of at least 40 Negroes to dance in the house then occupied by them. Dism'd Feb. 1780.<sup>112</sup>

29 May 1780. Summons for Benjamin Chatfield to testify on behalf of Henry Cornick, defendant, at the suit of Amos Weeks against him. Endorsed: "Not to be found."<sup>113</sup>

12 June 1780. Articles of Agreement between Joel Simmons of the One Part and Amos Weeks, William Russel, Benj. Hicks &c on the other part Witnesseth to Wit: That the said Joel Simmons doth Agree to Build a Vessell of the following Dimensions, vizt: Fifty feet strait Rabbet, Twenty feet Beam, Eight & half feet Dept in Hold at the Rate of Two Hundred and fifty Pounds pr Ton, etc., etc. On the back of this paper is the following: "Russell &c vs. A. Lovitt. Judgt for Deft. Sept 1783." This paper was attached to others involving Adam Lovitt and the burning of a vessel.<sup>114</sup>

25 June 1782. Elizabeth Cannon makes oath that she is afraid that Amos Weeks will beat, wound or kill her, etc. Warrant issued for Amos Weeks. Endorsed: "Not found. Dism'd July 82."<sup>115</sup>

25 Aug. 1784. Capias for John Phillips Biddle & Sarah his wife, adm'rs of Henry Gasking deceased, to answer Amos Weeks, adm'r &c [of] Wm Keeling Junr deed, of a plea of Trespass on the Case, damage £20.<sup>116</sup>

28 June 1787. Summons for Amos Weeks to answer the petition of Thomas Lawson for £1:5 due by account dated 1786, for "Cincinnatus's Service with your Mare by the Season at 25/ for which he stood."<sup>117</sup>

Weeks' legal appearances are interspersed with his militia service. His 1781 activities against the British under Benedict Arnold may have been directed by then Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson himself. In a letter to the Speaker of the House of Delegates, Governor Benjamin Harrison enclosed a “Pay roll of Capt Amos Weeks. This officer appears to have been appointed by Governor Jefferson to take command of a company of Rangers, and report from every quarter represents him to have rendered the most essential services.”<sup>118</sup> This might explain his constant movements, operations well outside Princess Anne County, and coordination with other forces such as General Isaac Gregory's North Carolina militia.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>113</sup> John Creecy, ed., *Princess Anne County Loose Papers, 1700-1789*, (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1954), 104.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>118</sup> Governor Harrison to the Speaker of the House of Delegates, June 12, 1782, in H.L. McIlwaine, ed., *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia*, 3, (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1929), 249-50.

Even as the British evacuated Portsmouth and the fighting in Virginia evolved into the siege of the British at Yorktown, Weeks was still cooperating with officials to ensure the safety and security of Princess Anne County. As Weeks reported:

“I have Seek into the Situation of People and I find a Great Many Disaffected in the county, Whom I think Should be Brought to Justice, And I am Getting to Gather My Men Upon that intent and Capt Butt’s Men Will Join me as Soon as Possible and then I Inten to Go Amongst them and Brig as Many as I Gett to Head Quarters, Where I hope that they Will Meett with that Punishment Due to a Tory and a Enemy to the Country.”<sup>119</sup>

While Ewald referred to Weeks as a “Major,” all American references to his rank were always as “Captain.” It is not clear why Ewald would refer to Weeks by the higher rank. Little else is known of Amos Weeks, however, an 1810 listing of slave owners in Princess Anne County show Elizabeth Weeks as the owner of 19 slaves.<sup>120</sup> It is possible that Amos Weeks passed sometime before with his wife inheriting his property. Where exactly the Weeks’ homestead was located is unknown.

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<sup>119</sup> Amos Weeks to Thomas Newton, September 17, 1781, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 2, 448-49.

<sup>120</sup> “Slave Owners, Princess Anne County, 1810,” *Lower Norfolk County Antiquary*, No. 1, part 3 (1896): 77.



## Appendix B - Information and Intelligence in Princess Anne County

Word that Benedict Arnold was to command a force for operations in Virginia appeared to reach those in Virginia fairly quickly. George Washington's spy network operating in and around New York City was able to garner details of the planned operation and relay them to Washington and then to Virginia. His arrival was not unexpected but his specific scheme of maneuver when in the state was still unknown. Upon his appearance at Cape Henry, word would immediately be relayed to Governor Thomas Jefferson in Richmond. The post at Cape Henry was established in anticipation of the arrival of the French Fleet. As Washington explained:

I have the pleasure to inform Your Excellency confidentially that a French Fleet may in the course of a few Weeks be expected upon this Coast, and as it is uncertain what part of the land they may first make, Gentlemen are to be stationed at different points to give them Signals and to make them some necessary communications immediately upon their arrival. Major Galvan who will have the honor of delivering this to your Excellency is appointed to go down to Cape Henry for the purposes above mentioned, and as He will have occasion to keep one or two Boats in constant readiness to go off upon the appearance of the Fleet, I shall be much obliged by your giving an order to the person who has the superintendence of the public Vessels and Craft in Virginia to supply him with the necessary number — Should the public have none of the proper kind in their possession, you will be pleased to recommend to Major Galvan the most certain and speedy method of procuring them — One or two skilful and trusty pilots will also be necessary, that if any of the ships should have occasion to enter the Bay, they may not be at a loss.

Your Excellency will no doubt see the propriety of keeping the object of Major Galvans mission as much a secret as possible, lest the importance of the dispatches with which he is charged — might be an inducement to some of the disaffected to take him off. It would add much to his security, if your Excellency would be good enough to introduce him to some Gentleman in the neighbourhood of Cape Henry, in whom he may confide and with whom he may remain while in that quarter.<sup>121</sup>

The "Gentleman" in the Cape Henry area was likely Col. John Thorowgood Jr. who was active in the Virginia Convention and known to Jefferson. Thorowgood may have suggested that Galvan stay with the Keeling's due to the proximity of their plantation to Cape Henry where the preponderance of his lookout and liaison duties would take place. In support of Galvan's mission, an express service was established between Cape Henry and Richmond:

Instructions to Express Riders between Richmond and Cape Henry [ca. 31 May 1780]

To \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>121</sup> From George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 15 May 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-01749>.

You are to proceed immediately to Hood's and be there in constant readiness, never absenting yourself a moment from your quarters, nor suffering your horse to be out of your instantaneous command.

Whenever you shall receive from the express who will be placed next to you any letter or paper from me to Majr. Galvan you will proceed without a moment's delay by night and by day and without regard to weather to carry it down to the next express stationed at \_\_\_\_\_. And when you receive a letter or paper from Majr. Galvan to me you are to proceed in like manner with it to this place; always returning to your station, after the delivery, moderately but without delay. You are to give a receipt specifying the hour and minute at which you receive any such paper, and to take a like receipt from the express to whom you shall deliver it.

You will continue in this duty till you shall be notified by Majr. Galvan or myself that you may return from your station.<sup>122</sup>

The system apparently worked as Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson received word of the arrival of Arnold's force literally within hours of their arrival in the Chesapeake Bay. These reports came from multiple sources both official military and private merchants concerned about the latest appearance. Jefferson immediately notified Baron von Steuben "I have this moment received information that 27 sail of vessels, 18 of which were square rigged, were yesterday morning just below Willoughby's point. No other circumstance being given to conjecture their force or destination," in order for von Steuben to respond with the Continental Army forces at his disposal.<sup>123</sup> Von Steuben had been appraised on the fleet's movement from New York and was likely expecting their arrival.

Once word of the arrival of Arnold's force was received, local militia forces responded accordingly. In Princess Anne County, Amos Weeks would have received word from Major Galvan at Cape Henry or even North Carolina General Isaac Gregory who had established his headquarters in the Dismal Swamp.<sup>124</sup> The movement of Weeks' militia through the back country enabled them to counter the movements of the British who, with the exception of Ewald's movement from Great Bridge to James's Plantation, primarily used the scant, but established, road network in the county. Weeks would have obtained information on the British activities from numerous Patriots located throughout the region.

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<sup>122</sup> "Instructions to Express Riders between Richmond and Cape Henry, [ca. 31 May 1780]," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-03-02-0471>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 3, 18 June 1779–30 September 1780, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 404.].

<sup>123</sup> From Thomas Jefferson to Steuben, 31 December 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-04-02-0321>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 4, 1 October 1780–24 February 1781, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, pp. 254–255.].

<sup>124</sup> A letter from Gregory to North Carolina Governor Aber Nash dated November 10, 1780 lists "Camp Great Swamp" as the location. Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, 15, (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Bros., Book and Job Printers, 1898), 149.

Conversely, the British had their own network of intelligence utilizing Loyalists in the area to report any militia movements or activity evidenced from the encoded message held by a Loyalist. As Ewald amply demonstrated, information could be obtained through bribe or threat. Many of Ewald and Simcoe's movements through Princess Anne County were in response to information obtained from Loyalists in the area.

Life in the area was tough and all in all, many residents of the area were likely ambivalent about who was the occupier of the area and were more interested in earning a living than supporting a cause. As such, some may have been opportunists providing whatever information or support was required to either side for either some sort of gain (such as the money offered by Ewald) or to avoid being characterized as a Patriot or Loyalist and preventing retribution from the other side.<sup>125</sup> Regardless, such activities and attitudes in the county made it difficult for the British to achieve their objectives in the region.

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<sup>125</sup> See Adele Hast, *Loyalism in Virginia during the American Revolution: The Norfolk Area and the Eastern Shore*, PhD Dissertation, University of Iowa, July, 1979.

## Appendix C - The Plan to Capture Benedict Arnold

In 1781, Benedict Arnold was easily the most reviled person in the United States. His traitorous activities made him both target and wanted man. His appointment as a Brigadier General in the British Army was also done with a certain degree of trepidation. He betrayed the United States – he could easily betray the British as well. As such, General Clinton took certain measures to guard against any such treachery. Arnold's order specifically required consultation with his two Lieutenant Colonels – Simcoe and Dundas – “officers of great experience and much in my confidence” – “previous to your undertaking any operation of consequence.”<sup>126</sup> Both Lieutenant Colonels also carried blank commissions in order to assume command of the forces should Arnold's loyalty be tested.

Once it was apparent that Arnold was embarking British ships for an expedition, the French were the first to try and intercept. A letter sent to Virginia Delegate Jones stated: "Some letters found on board of Prizes make known to us that the English show indications of establishing themselves at Portsmouth—



Figure 33: Benedict Arnold (Library of Congress)

Several refugees have returned to their confiscated possessions— These circumstances have determined M. Le Comt de Rochambeau and M. Detouches to undertake a more efficient expedition against Arnold.”<sup>127</sup> The idea, using siege weapons carried by the French ships and assisted by local militia and Continental Army forces, was to attack any British shipping in Hampton Roads to isolate Arnold's forces at Portsmouth then reduce the post at Portsmouth and force Arnold's surrender.

Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson had similar visions of capturing Arnold. In a letter to General Peter Muhlenberg of the Continental Army, currently operating in Virginia, Jefferson suggested using “men from the West of the mountains” to track down and “seize and bring off this greatest of all traitors.”<sup>128</sup> Muhlenberg did not appear to solicit the men Jefferson identified but he did move his forces toward Suffolk to pen Arnold's forces in place.

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<sup>126</sup> Clintons Instructions to Arnold, *The American Rebellion*, 482-483.

<sup>127</sup> Fragment of a letter without date, "to the Hon Mr Jones Delegate of Virginia" translated from French, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 1, 408. (December 1780).

<sup>128</sup> *Thomas Jefferson to John P. G. Muhlenberg*. -01-31, 1781. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000615/>.

acquainted as you are with the treasons of Arnold, I need say nothing  
 to inform you, or give you a proper sentiment of them. you will sea-  
 -dily suppose that it is above all things desiracable to ~~rescue him from~~  
 the hands of the drag him from those ~~who have~~ under whose wing he  
 is now sheltered. on his march to and from this place I am certain  
 it might have <sup>been</sup> done with facility by men of enterprise & ~~boldness~~ <sup>firmness</sup>.  
 I think it may still be done though perhaps not quite so easily.

Figure 34: Excerpt from Jefferson's Plan to Capture Benedict Arnold (Library of Congress)

The North Carolina militia under Isaac Gregory was already established in the Great Dismal Swamp following the appearance of Leslie in late 1780. Working with local militia forces to secure this southern flank, the eastern flank in Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties was all but untenable with the likes of Weeks and his militia causing trouble for the British. Even the arrival of the French Fleet in the Chesapeake Bay and Hampton Roads served to blockade the Elizabeth River and threaten a water escape.<sup>129</sup> Baron von Steuben reported to Washington the efforts in Virginia [excerpts]:

My last informed you that I had sent Capt. Depontiere on board the French Fleet, to know if I could under take anything against Portsmouth and was making the necessary preparations, as well for such an enterprize, as for the security of the French Vessels in case of danger.

For the first object I ordered General Gregory to assemble all the force in his power on the other side the Dismal Swamp, and hold them in readiness to second me whenever I should be ready, a line of Expresses was established between his Post and Suffolk, by means of which I could have given the necessary advice in less than 24 hours. General Muhlenberg advanced, with about 1000 Men to within 16 Miles of Portsmouth leaving the Posts of Coopers Mill & Suffolk properly guarded to cover his retreat.

General Nelson had orders to hold himself in readiness to march at the first notice— General Weedon form[ed] a corps of 800 Militia at Fredericksburg with orders to march towards Williamsburg, in case of an attack on Portsmouth this Corps was to have marched to Newport's news, and if the french vessels had been obliged to retire to York River, they were to have covered the Battery erected at York for the Defence of the Fleet.

Six or seven armed Merchant vessels in James River were to have joined the french vessells and assisted our operations all the boats that could be found were collected at Sandy point to transport the troops—Eight 18 pounders and two Mortars were prepared

<sup>129</sup> See the account of the ad hoc Virginia Navy efforts to augment the French and attack British shipping in "William Lewis and the Cape Henry Lighthouse," *Daybook*, Volume 20, Issue 3.

such were my preparations when Mr De Tilley informed me, he was not to remain in the Bay—that his orders were to Cruize between Charles Town and New York, and that he should sail the moment the wind would permit him.

The appearance of these Vessells had much alarmed the Enemy at Portsmouth, and encouraged our Militia, in the night of the 17. General Muhlenberg advanced near Portsmouth surprized a picket, made a Serjt & 12 Men prisoners, killd 2 Yagers and Took a waggon and 8 horses—he remained within a Mile and a half all next day but the Enemy kept close in their works.

The departure of The French Vessells, has destroyed all hopes of success, in an attempt on Portsmouth.<sup>130</sup>



Figure 35: Baron von Steuben (National Parks Service)

As von Steuben indicated, the movement of the French fleet changed the dynamics of the situation but it did not put Arnold at ease. As Ewald surmised from his dealings and observation of Arnold: “He always carried a pair of small pistols in his pocket as a last resort to escape being hanged.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> “To George Washington from Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin, Baron [von] Steuben, 23 February 1781,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-04974>.

<sup>131</sup> Ewald, *Diary*, 295.



## Further Research Opportunities

Historical research is like a puzzle – each piece – be it a name, date, place, or even artifact – in isolation means little. When the puzzle pieces are assembled though, a picture emerges. Often that picture is only one small section of a much larger puzzle. The individual pieces that may look like a leaf or a twig or bark when assembled may form the picture of a tree. That tree may be only one of many in a forest scene and therefore the “big picture” is incomplete. Such is the case with the Skirmish at James’s Plantation. The pieces of the puzzle that were assembled to provide us with a glimpse of what happened in Princess Anne County in February 1781 are only giving us a partial view of the Revolutionary War in Princess Anne County.

This study on the Skirmish at James’s Plantation is far from the definitive narrative at that event. In the future, the diary of a participant, a long-lost letter referring to the skirmish, or even some piece of physical evidence may emerge that will shine new light or perspective on this event. That is the challenge of history – it is anything but stagnant. In the meantime, the following are suggested areas for further research that may help fill in some of the blank puzzle pieces on the Revolutionary War in Princess Anne County.

- A Historical Highway Marker honoring the skirmish: The Virginia Historical Highway Marker program is used in honoring an historical person, place, event, or institution in Virginia. The Skirmish at James’s Plantation meets the criteria for an event of regional significance (the 1781 British invasion of Virginia and Benedict Arnold’s attempt to wrest Princess Anne County to British control being that significance) and is a likely candidate for such an honor.

- Battlefield Survey as part of the American Battlefield Protection Program: The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) is an initiative by the National Park Service to identify, document, and potentially preserve American battlefields from all wars. This study satisfies a large part of the background research and documentation associated with a formal battlefield survey. Although the primary area of the skirmish site is lost to modern development, there are several peripheral areas including the wooded and undeveloped areas around Nimmo United Methodist Church and Princess Anne Road that have remained undeveloped since the skirmish. ABPP guidelines are located at: <https://www.nps.gov/abpp/index.htm> and a survey would be an important piece of filling a significant gap in knowledge of the skirmish and skirmish site identified in the 2007 *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States*.

- Biography of Amos Weeks: Although there is enough primary source evidence to show that Amos Weeks was a significant figure in Princess Anne County, his background is largely unknown and warrants further study. He may very well have been a “New Englander” as Simcoe describes who eventually moved south to Virginia or he may have just simply been an obscure figure in Princess Anne County until rising to prominence in the American Revolution.

- Princess Anne County Loyalists: There are several known Princess Anne County Loyalists but the full accounting of their Loyalist activities is scant. John Saunders, Jacob Ellegood, Edward Hack Mosely, Sr., and George Logan are all readily identified as Loyalists but there were likely more and the overall impact (loss of property, arrest, prosecution, etc.) of the war (or independence) on these Loyalists is undocumented.

- Princess Anne County Patriots: The same goes for the Patriots of Princess Anne County. While many of the Patriot names prevail in post-war years, little is known about the degree of opposition they faced from Loyalists and British forces particularly during times when the British were either raiding or occupying nearby areas. Did British presence embolden Loyalists to seek retribution against Patriots?

- Naval Actions in and around Princess Anne County waters: Bordering the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean, Princess Anne County was often the first area of land encountered by ships entering ports in the region. As such it was an area ripe for blockade, privateering, and naval actions by opposing fleets. The September, 1781 Battle of Virginia Capes originated with the French Fleet in Lynnhaven Bay is well documented. The Battle of Cape Henry in March, 1781 is virtually unknown. In addition, the engagement between the HMS *Swift* (crew captured by the Princess Anne Militia) and the Privateer *Rattlesnake* barely rate mention in most Revolutionary War naval studies and even the capture of the Virginia Navy galley *Dasher* in Lynnhaven Bay is unknown. Such a study would highlight the war in Princess Anne County waters.

- The signal station at Cape Henry: Documents show that there was an active Patriot signal station at Cape Henry, presumably at or near the proposed site of the lighthouse, during most of the Revolution. How effective was this method of warning ships is unknown. The signal Station would have gained increased importance with the expected arrival of the French Fleet and the assignment of Maj William Galvan by George Washington to coordinate activities with the French. The role of and activities at Cape Henry in the Revolution will further aid interpretation of Cape Henry by the Cape Henry Historic Site Committee.

- Biography of Thomas Reynolds Walker: Thomas Reynold Walker appears to be a very significant and active figure in Princess Anne County. Documents show that he was placed in charge of the signal station at Cape Henry and that he was at the Skirmish at Kemp's Landing in addition to being a very public and respected figure in Princess Anne politics and leadership. A full account of his contributions, both militia and civilian, might show him as a much more prominent individual than already known.

- Revolutionary War claims from Princess Anne County: Despite the number of British raids into Princess Anne County throughout the course of the American Revolution, there appears to be relatively few claims for lost property. Crops, livestock, horses, boats, property and even slaves were either seized by the British or impressed by the Americans. A further study in this area will aid in determining the economic impact of the War in the area.

- The Princess Anne County Militia: The fairly small population of Princess Anne County meant that there would be a correspondingly small militia from the county. There appeared to be no shortage of militia officers from the county but the number of rank and file soldiers is unknown. Amos Weeks seemingly led a militia company almost continuously during the war but his chain-of-command, other militia units, and the overall organization of the Princess Anne County Militia is unknown. There also appeared to be several "agreements" where the militia freely operated with other militia units, other state militias (notably North Carolina) and the Continental Army.

- Economics of Princess Anne County: The agrarian character of Princess Anne County made the region ideal for supplying the Continental Army during the war. Additionally, trade in goods and products

produced in the county continued with few interruption during the war. How prosperous was the county during the war?

- A published study on the Revolutionary War in Princess Anne County: By incorporating previous research conducted with grants sponsored by the Virginia Beach Historic Preservation Commission, and soliciting additional contributions from local historians to incorporate other aspects of the Revolutionary War in Princess Anne County, a full, or at least more comprehensive, accounting of the war can be developed. Such an account currently does not exist as the war is only covered in scattered pieces in published histories of the county. Already completed products or studies include:

- Col. John Thorowgood, Jr. (2016)
- Washington/Rochambeau/de Grasse Meeting (2017)
- Skirmish at Kemp's Landing (2017)
- Josiah Phillips (2018)
- Skirmish at James's Plantation (2018)

- Archaeological study: Although the area that contains the site of James's Plantation and the likely skirmish area has been altered by modern development, thereby likely destroying the archaeological record, there are some adjacent areas that remain undeveloped that may provide archaeological evidence of the skirmish. The undeveloped areas to the west of the site (see Figure 34) provide the most likely area to find tell-tale signs of a skirmish including musket balls, flints, buttons, and other military implements.

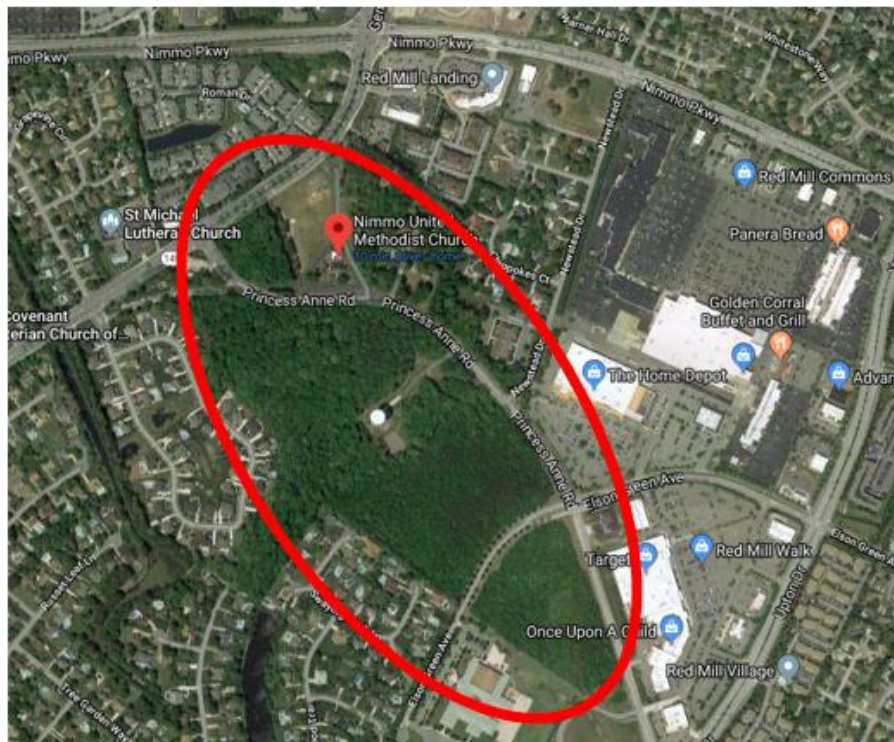


Figure 36: Area for possible archaeological survey (Google Maps)

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